



A nurse monitors a patient at a COVID-19 ward in Rasoul Akram Hospital in Tehran. Photo: WHO/Islamic Republic of Iran

Thursday, 16 December – In order to support the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran in enhancing health care provision in the country, a team of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) Headquarters, as well as the Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean, visited Tehran on 11 December at the request of the Ministry to provide technical guidance on the process.

The 3-day visit aimed to provide a platform for consultations and discussions on the proposed strategy by local authorities to scale up national capacity in health workforce education by enrolling additional medical students in universities of medical sciences. The proposal has been triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic that has weakened health systems worldwide, including in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and caused an immense burden on health systems and workforce.

During the visit, a number of meetings were held with Health Minister Dr Bahram Eynollahi, and a number of relevant high-ranking officials representing different stakeholders, where the issue of health workforce retention was highlighted as a major challenge.

Islamic Republic of Iran has an extensive primary health care network that calls for any health-related policy and decision-making to factor in availability of diverse skillsets in the overall health care network. That highlights the need to review and enhance the diversity of health care personnel to optimize the available workforce, particularly the currently outnumbered nursing professionals. Within that context, different WHO strategies, guidelines and tools to guide the process were presented.

The discussions concluded by underpinning the need and importance of undertaking a more in-depth study over the next 6 months to gain a better understanding of the situation, as well as exploring options to retain health workforce in a myriad of specialties, and reviewing scenarios aimed at strengthening the health workforce to advance universal health coverage across the country.



WHO staff and Iranian officials at a meeting with the Health Minister, Dr. Bahram Eynollahi, and officials representing the Ministry of Health, Islamic Republic of Iran, on 24 May 2024.