

Protecting the Vulnerable: The Right to Health Companionship in International Law

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the pivotal role of health companionship in supporting vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic illnesses. Health companionship is defined as providing comprehensive support, including physical, emotional, and social assistance, as well as advocacy within healthcare systems. The article underscores how international human rights frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) implicitly endorse the right to health and special care, highlighting the need for formal recognition of health companionship.

Key challenges facing the implementation of health companionship include legal and policy barriers, resource limitations, and accessibility issues. The article calls for comprehensive legal reforms to address these barriers, including the establishment of clear standards for health companions and the integration of their roles into national health policies. Advocacy and public awareness are deemed essential for advancing the recognition and support of health companionship. Recommendations include enacting specific laws, integrating health companions into healthcare policies, and raising awareness through campaigns and success stories.

Looking ahead, the article highlights how technological advancements, including

telehealth and wearable devices, are transforming health companionship. International organizations are crucial in developing global standards and supporting research to enhance the effectiveness of health companionship. Strengthening legal frameworks, promoting awareness, and leveraging technological innovations are key to improving health outcomes and ensuring that health companionship is fully integrated into healthcare systems.

Keywords: Health Companionship, Right to Health, Ethical Responsibilities, Patient Care

1. INTRODUCTION

The right to health companionship under international law is vital for human dignity and well-being. It offers essential emotional, psychological, and practical support, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses, enhancing care beyond traditional treatments.

Within international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are key instruments that establish rights related to health and well-being. While not explicitly mentioned, documents like Article 25 of the UDHR can be interpreted to support the right to health companionship, as they emphasize a standard of living that includes both physical and emotional well-being.¹ Similarly, the UNCRC emphasizes the need for care and

¹ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25.

protection for children, aligning with the role of health companions in ensuring that children receive comprehensive support². Recognizing the right to health companionship in international law would formally include health companions in healthcare, improving support for vulnerable populations by addressing emotional and social needs.

The UDHR³, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is a foundational international document that articulates, for the first time, fundamental human rights that are to be universally protected⁴. The UDHR consists of 30 articles that detail a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights⁵. It emphasizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the cornerstone of freedom, justice, and peace in the world⁶. Among the most relevant to health are Article 3, which asserts the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and Article 25, which recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living⁷. This includes the right to food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services⁸.

The UDHR explicitly acknowledges the need for special care and assistance to be provided to vulnerable groups, stating in Article 25 that "motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance"⁹. This principle underscores the importance of supporting individuals with unique needs, particularly during critical periods such as pregnancy, childbirth, and early childhood development. The right to an adequate standard of living, which includes medical care and necessary social services, is vital for

ensuring the health and well-being of these vulnerable populations¹⁰.

The UNCRC¹¹, adopted in 1989, further builds on these principles by providing a comprehensive human rights treaty that enshrines specific rights for children under the age of 18. It is a legally binding international agreement that recognizes the need for special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, due to the vulnerability of children¹². The UNCRC covers a wide range of rights, spanning civil, political, economic, social, and cultural domains¹³. Among the most significant for health and well-being is Article 24, which asserts the right of the child to the highest attainable standard of health and access to healthcare services¹⁴. Additionally, Article 19 emphasizes the protection of children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, or maltreatment¹⁵.

Together, these frameworks provide a universal set of standards and principles aimed at ensuring that all individuals, particularly children, are treated with dignity and have access to the basic necessities of life, including healthcare¹⁶. They serve as a basis for advocating for the recognition of the right to health companionship, particularly as a means of supporting the health and well-being of vulnerable populations. The recognition of health companionship within these frameworks would not only align with the principles of human dignity and care enshrined in the UDHR and UNCRC but also address the specific needs of vulnerable groups by providing them with comprehensive, continuous, and compassionate care¹⁷.

² United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Articles 3 and 24.

³ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from UN

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., Preamble.

⁷ Ibid., Article 3

⁸ Ibid., Article 25.

⁹ Ibid., Article 25(2).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from UNICEF

¹² Ibid., Preamble.

¹³ Ibid., Articles 1-54.

¹⁴ Ibid., Article 24.

¹⁵ Ibid., Article 19.

¹⁶ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

2. Understanding Health Companionship

Health companionship offers vital support to individuals facing medical challenges, boosting treatment adherence and quality of life. This role can be filled by family members, friends, caregivers, or trained professionals, who provide emotional, practical, and systemic support, ultimately enhancing overall health outcomes.

Roles and Responsibilities and importance¹⁸ of a Health Companion¹⁹

a. Emotional Support

Health companions are crucial in providing emotional support to patients during illness and recovery. They offer comfort and reassurance, helping to alleviate anxiety, depression, and isolation. By offering a listening ear and empathetic understanding, health companions play a vital role in managing the psychological burden of serious health conditions and supporting patients in coping with the emotional aspects of their health challenges.

b. Practical Assistance

Health companions provide essential practical support to patients by assisting with daily activities, such as bathing, dressing, and mobility, which can be challenging for those with physical or cognitive impairments. They also help with medication management by reminding patients to take their medications and ensuring proper dosage. Additionally, health companions support patients in navigating complex healthcare systems, attending medical appointments, and understanding treatment plans.

c. Advocacy

Health companions are crucial advocates for patients in medical settings, ensuring their needs and preferences are communicated and

respected. They act as the patient's voice, conveying their wishes and concerns to healthcare professionals, protecting their rights, and ensuring that care aligns with their values. This advocacy is particularly vital when patients are unable to speak for themselves due to incapacitation or other barriers.

d. Information and Education

Health companions bridge the gap between patients and complex medical information, offering crucial guidance on conditions, treatments, and care options. They educate patients and families about self-care practices and healthy choices, empowering them to actively manage their health. They assist in understanding and coping with treatment side effects, ensuring patients are informed and supported throughout their care journey.

e. Social and Recreational Support

Health companions enhance patient's quality of life by encouraging social and recreational activities. They help reduce loneliness and depression by facilitating social engagement and promoting hobbies, thus maintaining a sense of normalcy and joy crucial for mental and emotional well-being.

f. Logistical Support

Health companions also offer logistical support by arranging transportation to medical appointments and assisting with paperwork. They ensure patients can access necessary care and manage complex insurance forms and medical documents, easing the burden of these tasks.

g. Monitoring and Reporting

Health companions are essential for monitoring patient's conditions, noting any subtle changes in health, and reporting

¹⁸ "Caregiving for Family and Friends — A Public Health Issue" , <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/caregiving/pdf/caregiver-brief-508.pdf> retrieved on 15/08/2024

¹⁹ "Physical and Mental Health Effects of Family Caregiving" [Richard Schulz](#), PhD and [Paula R.](#)

[Sherwood](#), PhD, RN, CNRN, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2791523/> retrieved on 15/08/2024

concerns to healthcare providers. Their observations enable early intervention and timely adjustments in care, ensuring that patients receive prompt and appropriate medical attention.

Scope of Health Companionship

The scope of health companionship varies based on patient needs and care settings, such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, or home care. It ranges from occasional support to full-time care, addressing medical, emotional, social, and practical needs. Recognizing health companionship as a human right ensures comprehensive care for individuals lacking strong support networks, promoting overall well-being and quality of life.

3. The Right to Health Companionship in the UDHR

Several articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) support the right to health companionship by emphasizing individual well-being, dignity, and rights. Key articles include:

3.1 Article 3: Right to Life, Liberty, and Security of Person²⁰

This article asserts the right to life, liberty, and security. Health companionship supports this by offering emotional, physical, and practical care, enhancing individual safety and well-being.

3.2 Article 12: Right to Privacy and Family Life

Article 12 protects individuals from arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home, or correspondence²¹. Health companionship

supports this right by ensuring that patients can have someone they trust present during medical treatments and consultations, preserving their dignity and privacy. This presence also supports the maintenance of family life, as health companions often include family members or close associates who provide personal support.

3.3 Article 22: Right to Social Security

This article recognizes the right of every person to social security, which includes access to services necessary for their health and well-being²². Health companionship can be seen as a form of social support that contributes to an individual's social security by providing care and assistance that helps maintain their health and well-being.

3.4 Article 25: Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

Article 25 states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services. It specifically mentions that "motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance"²³. Health companions play a crucial role in ensuring this adequate standard of living by supporting individuals in accessing and receiving necessary medical care and social services, thus contributing to their overall health and well-being²⁴.

3.5 Article 29: Duties to the Community

Article 29 acknowledges that everyone has duties to the community in which they live²⁵. This includes the responsibility to respect the rights and freedoms of others. Health companionship, as a form of caregiving,

²⁰ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> article 03 retrieved on 15/08/2024

²¹ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 12. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

²² United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 22. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

²³ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 25. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

²⁴ Wilkinson, Richard & Marmot, Michael. (1998). Social determinants of health: the solid facts. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/108082>

²⁵ United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 29. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

reflects a communal duty to support vulnerable members of society, such as the sick, elderly, and those with disabilities, ensuring they can enjoy their rights fully.

Interpretation and Application

The above articles collectively underscore the UDHR's commitment to ensuring that individuals receive the care and support necessary for a life of dignity and security. Health companionship, which involves providing emotional, physical, and logistical support to patients, aligns with these principles by promoting well-being, safeguarding rights, and enhancing the quality of life for individuals facing health challenges. These interpretations support the argument that the right to health companionship is implicitly recognized within the broader framework of the UDHR, advocating for its explicit acknowledgment and protection.

4. The Right to Health Companionship in the UNCRC

The UNCRC outlines children's rights and state obligations to protect them, highlighting the importance of adequate care and support for their health and well-being.

4.1 Article 3: Best Interests of the Child

This article establishes that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration²⁶. It implies that the child's well-being, including health and emotional welfare, should be prioritized in decision-making processes. This principle justifies the provision of health companions, as they play a crucial role in

safeguarding the child's interests by offering necessary care and support.

4.2 Article 6: Right to Life, Survival, and Development

Article 6 recognizes the child's inherent right to life and obliges states to ensure the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child²⁷. This right encompasses not only physical health but also mental and emotional well-being. Health companions can significantly contribute to the holistic development of children by providing consistent care, emotional support, and guidance, thereby supporting their overall growth and well-being.

4.3 Article 19: Protection from Abuse and Neglect

This article mandates that children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation²⁸. Health companions, particularly in the context of healthcare settings, can serve as advocates and protectors, ensuring that children receive safe and appropriate care and are not subjected to harmful practices or environments.

4.4 Article 24: Right to Health and Health Services

Article 24 explicitly recognizes the right of the child to the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health²⁹. It obliges states to take appropriate measures to diminish child mortality, ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and healthcare, combat disease and malnutrition, and promote health education. Health

²⁶ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 3. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

²⁷ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 6. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

²⁸ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 19. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

²⁹ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 24. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

companions are integral to achieving these objectives as they help children access healthcare services, ensure compliance with medical treatments, and provide education on health-related issues, thereby promoting better health outcomes.

4.5 Article 27: Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

This article asserts that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development³⁰. The role of health companions is crucial in maintaining this standard, as they assist in providing care and support that contribute to a child's overall well-being. This includes ensuring that children have access to nutrition, healthcare, and a supportive environment conducive to their healthy development.

4.6 Article 31: Right to Play, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

Article 31 acknowledges the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts³¹. Health companions can support these rights by facilitating access to recreational and cultural activities, especially for children with chronic illnesses or disabilities who may face barriers in engaging in such activities.

Interpretation and Application

These articles collectively emphasize the importance of ensuring that children receive comprehensive care that addresses their physical, emotional, and social needs. The role of health companions is essential in fulfilling these rights, as they provide a stable and supportive presence in the lives of

children, advocating for their health, safety, and overall well-being. By ensuring that children's rights are protected and their needs are met, health companions contribute to creating a nurturing environment that allows children to thrive.

5. Special Considerations for Children: Unique Needs and the Role of Health Companions³²

Children, due to their developmental stages and vulnerability, have unique needs that require specialized support to ensure their physical and emotional well-being. Health companions play a crucial role in addressing these needs, offering tailored care that supports children's overall health and development.

5.1 Physical Needs

a. Medical Care and Monitoring:

Health companions are vital for children with chronic illnesses or undergoing treatment, as they ensure continuous monitoring of health by tracking vital signs and managing medication. They also offer comfort and reassurance during medical procedures, helping to explain these processes in a child-friendly manner and reducing associated anxiety.

b. Daily Living Assistance:

Health companions assist children with disabilities or severe health conditions in daily activities like eating, bathing, dressing, and mobility, ensuring their comfort and hygiene. They also manage dietary needs to provide proper nutrition, crucial for growth and recovery.

5.2 Emotional Needs

a. Emotional Support and Reassurance:

³⁰ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 27. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

³¹ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 31. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

³² "The Experience of Parental Caregiving for Children With Medical Complexity" [Jessica Teicher, MD,¹ Clara Moore, MSc,² Kayla Esser, BSc,² Natalie Weiser, MA,² Danielle Arje, MD, MSc,^{1,2} Eyal Cohen, MD, MSc,^{1,2,3,4} and Julia Orkin, MD, MSc^{1,2,3}](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10676025/) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10676025/> retrieved on 15/08/2024

Health companions offer emotional support to children by providing comfort and security, reducing fear and anxiety. They create a supportive environment for children to express their feelings, fostering emotional resilience and mental well-being.

b. Psychological Development:

i. Building Resilience: Health companions help children build coping mechanisms and resilience by encouraging positive thinking and emotional expression. They play a key role in helping children adapt to their health challenges and maintain a positive outlook.

ii. Maintaining Normalcy: By engaging children in age-appropriate activities, such as play, hobbies, and educational tasks, health companions support normal psychological development and help children maintain a sense of normalcy despite health challenges. Such activities are essential in ensuring that children do not feel excluded from their peer group and can continue to develop socially and emotionally.

5.3 Social Needs

a. Interaction and Engagement:

Health companions help children stay socially connected with peers and family, preventing isolation and supporting emotional well-being. They encourage participation in recreational and educational activities, promoting social development and integration, especially for those confined to home or hospital settings.

b. Advocacy and Communication:

Health companions advocate for children's needs in healthcare settings, ensuring their preferences are respected. They also support families by facilitating understanding and communication about the child's needs, promoting cohesive and effective caregiving.

5.4 Developmental Considerations

Health companions offer age-appropriate care by tailoring interventions to the child's developmental stage, using suitable language and activities to support their understanding and engagement. They focus on promoting developmental milestones and encourage activities that support cognitive, emotional, and physical growth.

5.5 Education and Learning:

Educational Support: Health companions help with educational needs, including tutoring or assisting with schoolwork. This support ensures that health conditions do not hinder academic progress and intellectual growth.

Health Education: They educate children about their health condition in a way that is understandable and empowering, helping them take an active role in managing their health. Understanding their condition can empower children and contribute to better health outcomes³³.

6. Case Studies and Examples³⁴

Success Stories³⁵ of Children Thriving at DEIC with the Support of Trained Health Companion Parents³⁶

6.1. Aarya's Journey to Finding Her Voice

Aarya, born with profound hearing loss, received a cochlear implant at age two. Her speech therapy at DEIC, supported by her mother's training, involved playful activities to reinforce learning. Over two years, Aarya's vocabulary expanded significantly, and by age five, she confidently engaged with the world around her.

6.2. Arjun's Leap Forward in Development

protect their identities, as per DEIC Dharashiv's confidentiality policy.

³⁵ DEIC Dharashiv Patient Case Studies, 2024 (Names are

³⁶ Interviews with DEIC Therapists and Health Companions, Dharashiv, 2024.

³³ World Health Organization. (2012). *Health Education: Theoretical Concepts, Effective Strategies, and Core Competencies: A Foundation Document to Guide Capacity Development of Health Educators*. World Health Organization. https://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/emrpub_2012_en_1362.pdf

³⁴ **Note:** The names of the children in these success stories have been replaced with imaginary names to

Arjun, who faced developmental delays, received physiotherapy at DEIC to address motor skills and social interaction challenges. His father, trained by therapists, integrated exercises into daily routines. With creative play and targeted activities, Arjun gained strength and confidence, actively participating in his surroundings within a year.

6.3. Rohan's Progress in Clear Communication

Rohan, diagnosed with severe hearing loss, had cochlear implant surgery at age three. His mother, trained by DEIC therapists, used engaging activities to support his speech therapy at home. Within a year, Rohan's speech became clear, and by age six, he was fluent in storytelling, thanks to the combined efforts of DEIC and his mother's consistent support.

7. Challenges in Implementing the Right to Health Companionship³⁷

7.1. Legal and Policy Barriers:

- a. **Lack of Legislation:** Absence of specific laws recognizing health companionship creates gaps and disparities in care.
- b. **Inconsistent Regulations:** Variability in regulations leads to uneven care quality and fragmented health systems.
- c. **Legal and Liability Concerns:** Unclear professional boundaries and scope of practice limit effective use and integration of health companions.

7.2. Resource and Accessibility Issues:

- a. **Shortage of Trained Companions:** Limited availability, especially in rural and underserved areas, exacerbates disparities.
- b. **Financial Barriers:** High costs and inadequate insurance coverage restrict access, particularly for low-income groups.
- c. **Geographic and Infrastructure Challenges:** Isolation and poor

infrastructure limit access to health companions.

- d. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Stigma and lack of awareness affect the acceptance and use of health companionship services.

7.3. Self-Care Issues for Health Companions³⁸

- a. **Physical and Emotional Strain:** Health companions often experience physical and emotional exhaustion due to long hours and high stress, which can affect their overall health and well-being.
- b. **Risk of Burnout:** The constant demand to care for others can lead to burnout, characterized by fatigue, decreased motivation, and emotional exhaustion.
- c. **Balancing Responsibilities:** Juggling caregiving duties with personal life can be challenging, making it difficult for health companions to find time for their own health and self-care.
- d. **Impact on Health:** The stress and physical demands of caregiving can contribute to health issues, including chronic conditions and mental health challenges.
- e. **Need for Self-Care:** To maintain their health and effectiveness, health companions must prioritize self-care practices, stress management, and seek support when needed.
- f. **Importance of Support Systems:** Access to resources and support systems is essential for health companions to manage their own well-being while continuing to provide high-quality care.

8. Advocacy and Policy Recommendations

To effectively implement and support the right to health companionship, it's essential to strengthen legal frameworks and promote awareness. These steps can ensure that health companionship becomes an integral part of

³⁷ <https://nafc.org/bhealth-blog/the-biggest-challenges-faced-by-caregivers/> retrieved on 15/08/2024

³⁸Coping with Caregiving <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/sites/newsinhealth/files/2015/December/NIHNiHDec2015.pdf> retrived on 15/08/2024

the healthcare system, benefiting individuals across various contexts.

8.1 Strengthening Legal Frameworks

Incorporate health companionship into national laws by advocating for legislation that recognizes and protects the role, setting clear standards for training, responsibilities, and integration into health policies. Update international frameworks like the UDHR and UNCRC to include health companionship and establish global standards through organizations such as WHO and the UN. Ensure legal protections for health companions, including safeguards against discrimination and fair working conditions, by advocating for policy changes through lobbying, public campaigns, and collaboration with advocacy groups.

8.2 Promoting Awareness and Support

Raise public awareness about the crucial role of health companions through education campaigns and success stories, showcasing their benefits to patients and policymakers. Advocate for government support by proposing funding for training, subsidies, and integration into healthcare systems. Engage NGOs to advance the right to health companionship, develop community programs, and provide support. Promote research on the impact of health companions to drive policy changes and regularly evaluate programs to improve effectiveness and best practices.

9. The Future of Health Companionship in International Law

The future of health companionship is increasingly shaped by emerging trends and innovations, alongside the efforts of international organizations to promote and safeguard this essential aspect of healthcare. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for advancing the recognition and integration of health companions into global health systems.

9.1 Emerging Trends in Health Companionship

a. Technological Innovations

Advances in telehealth and remote monitoring technologies are transforming health companionship by enabling virtual support and seamless communication between patients and healthcare providers. Wearable devices that track vital signs and health metrics further enhance this by providing real-time data, allowing health companions to monitor conditions accurately and offer timely, personalized care.

b. Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI-powered assistants and chatbots can enhance health companionship by offering information, reminders, and caregiving guidance, improving efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, predictive analytics can analyse patient data to forecast health trends, enabling health companions to proactively address potential issues and support better care planning and decision-making.

c. Personalized Care Models

The trend towards patient-centred care emphasizes tailoring health companionship to individual needs, involving customized care plans and support strategies. This shift aligns with the growing focus on holistic care, where health companions play a vital role in addressing not just physical health but also emotional, social, and psychological well-being.

d. Expanding Roles and Training

The scope of practice for health companions is broadening to encompass mental health support, care coordination, and advocacy, reflecting an expansion in their responsibilities. To meet these evolving needs, specialized training programs are being developed, focusing on areas like palliative care, pediatric

care, and chronic disease management. These programs aim to enhance health companions' skills and ensure they are well-equipped to provide comprehensive and effective support.

10. CONCLUSION

Health companions play a crucial role in addressing the unique physical, emotional, and social needs of children and individuals across diverse settings, extending beyond medical care to include emotional support, developmental encouragement, and social engagement. However, implementing the right to health companionship faces significant challenges, requiring a multi-faceted approach that includes legal reforms, policy development, and resource allocation. Strengthening legal frameworks and promoting awareness are essential to establishing clear standards for health companionship and ensuring equitable access to support, particularly for those in vulnerable situations. Future trends, including technological advancements like telehealth, AI-powered assistants, and evolving care models, will shape the role of health companions, while international organizations will play a key role in promoting global standards, advocating for recognition, and supporting research. By addressing these challenges and embracing emerging trends, health companionship can become a vital and effective element of healthcare, significantly enhancing the well-being of individuals, especially those in vulnerable situations.

Call to Action

To uphold the right to health companionship under human rights and international law:

1. **Policymakers** should enact laws recognizing health companionship as a fundamental right and integrate it into national health strategies with adequate support.
2. **Healthcare Professionals** must advocate for including health companions in care teams, ensuring they are well-trained and resourced.
3. **NGOs** should develop training programs, raise awareness, and lobby for health companionship in policies, focusing on underserved communities and collaborating with authorities.
4. **The Public** should support and promote health companionship by raising awareness, engaging in advocacy, and backing relevant organizations.

Addressing these areas ensures equitable, compassionate care, aligning with international human rights standards.

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