



EMPHNET

The Eastern Mediterranean
Public Health Network



2014 - 2015

Sharing Success

ANNUAL REPORT

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2014-2015 EMPHNET's Annual Status Report

Prepared by EMPHNET

“We are delighted to report on a successful year for EMHNET. We moved towards achieving our objectives with confidence and continue to provide opportunities for strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This report describes the progress in year 2014-2015”

The Eastern Mediterranean Public health Network provides ongoing technical and administrative support to countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This support is provided under a co-operative agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services – US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), implemented by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation Office of Cooperative Threat Reduction (ISN/CTR).



The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET)

Message from the Executive Director of EMPHNET



I am pleased to present to you, on behalf of EMPHNET's staff, our annual report for the fiscal year 2014-2015. The report offers a summary of our accomplishments, thus mirroring successful implementation of the work plan that we prepared last year. As I present this report, I can say with confidence that we look forward to a promising year that is filled with achievements.

I take this opportunity to thank our member countries for the high level of cooperation and collaboration they have shown us, as EMPHNET believes that such collaborations fuel its success. We will continue to work deliberately to seize opportunities that can improve public health in our region, as we remain committed to assisting member countries in their quest to meet the health needs of their communities. We will explore all opportunities that increase the scope of our work and improve our performance, as our top priority is to force positive change that serves to improve public health. I present to you this annual report with pride and content and I celebrate with you our shared achievements.

During this year, we managed to strengthen ties with countries and expand our regional prominence. We enhanced our support for FETPs by bringing in new people on board. This year, our main focus

was to utilize available resources for meeting the desire to excel and perform within the expectations of our members.

As such, we have delivered planned activities successfully while making progress towards widening our scope of service within a regional context. Moreover, this year allowed us to focus on building new relations and collaborations with several stakeholders interested in partnering with EMPHNET in an attempt to improve public health in our region.

When thinking globally, one cannot overlook the importance of our region. Therefore, influencing public health in our region contributes to the numerous efforts that attempt to affect global health. As we approach the coming year, we pledge to accomplish more and to focus on areas that are of priority concern to our member countries. At the same time, we remain persistent to support the regional approach in combatting and responding to public health threats in the region. We appreciate the support of the Board of Directors, Ministries of Health, the CDC and all other partners and stakeholders. Together, we can achieve more.

Mohannad Al-Nsour, M.D., M.Sc, PhD
Executive Director / EMPHNET

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List of Abbreviations

EMR	Eastern Mediterranean Region
BEP	Biosecurity Engagement Program
CDC	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EMPHNET	Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network
EOC	Emergency Operation Centers
EVD	Ebola Virus Diseases
FETP	Field Epidemiology Training Programs
FP	Family Planning
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
ICAP	AIDS Care and Treatment Programs
IHR	International Health Regulations
J-CAP	Jordan Communication, Advocacy, and Policy
M&R	Measles and Rubella
MediPIET	Mediterranean Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training
MERS CoV	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus
MG	Mass Gathering
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
RHAS	Royal Health Awareness Society
RST	Rapid Response Teams
SARI	Severe Acute Respiratory Illness
SIAs	supplementary immunization activities
TEPHINET	Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Networks
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO-EMRO	World Health Organization-Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office

Introduction



EMPHNET: An Overview

The 2014-2015 Annual Progress Report highlights achievements of the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET). The Network leverages work with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) undertaken to strengthen public health systems in an effort to contribute to improved health outcomes in the region. Established in 2009, EMPHNET engages in activities to strengthen public health capacity in the EMR with a specific focus on applied epidemiology. As a prominent Public Health Network, EMPHNET works collaboratively with Ministries of Health (MOH) in the region to advance public health workforce capacity, conduct research, promote knowledge sharing and enhance collaboration.

EMPHNET's work is guided by a comprehensive public health approach with emphasis on populations and risk factors. EMPHNET contributes to enhancing health status in the region by promoting country capacity in applied epidemiology with special emphasis on surveillance and outbreak investigations. EMPHNET believes in the power of information and knowledge sharing and partners with associations, institutions, networks and organizations that hold similar views. Its impact grows as it builds a network of expertise, which forms its strong attribute for fulfilling public health needs in the region. EMPHNET supports and promotes applied research in response to public health challenges and its team is guided by commitment to change.



“Scene from Zaatari Camp in Jordan”

EMPHNET's Vision

Better health for people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

EMPHNET's vision is inspired by the fact that the EMR is a region that is challenged by several adversities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this region includes 22 countries with a population of 583 million people. These countries vary in socioeconomic status with prevailing duality of health problems brought about by the high prevalence of infectious diseases and the increasing burden of non-communicable diseases. Many of the region's countries are challenged by epidemiological transitions, limited resources, health inequity and political instability, which to a large extent impede improvement in the population's health outcomes. EMPHNET's vision is inspired by its commitment to assist countries in the region achieve better population health status. In this regard, EMPHNET seeks to build collaborations and rosters of regional experts. To date, EMPHNET worked at building national and regional capacities in several priority public health areas, such as outbreak investigation, disease surveillance, rapid response, International Health Regulations (IHR) and more.

In the past few years, EMPHNET succeeded in creating a momentum for change by providing technical support and public

health workforce development in many needed areas. However, EMPHNET is aware of the many gaps that still need to be addressed in order to leverage population health outcomes in the EMR, and believes that it has a lot to offer to address these gaps in order to achieve better health for people in the region.

EMPHNET's Mission

To prevent and control diseases, conduct multidisciplinary research, and translate research into practice in the Eastern Mediterranean Region by strengthening and expanding applied epidemiology capacity; and working jointly with similar associations, networks and organizations.

EMPHNET works to achieve its vision by responding to public health needs with deliberate efforts that allow for health promotion and disease prevention. Its experienced team enables information sharing and knowledge expansion that is broad and comprehensive enough to extend beyond an individual country.

Working within a solid regional force, EMPHNET's team engages actively in mobilizing its efforts to provide support to countries in the region. It partners with ministries of health and other public health organizations. EMPHNET believes that collaborative measures can enhance the quality and effectiveness of public health services. This is achieved by consolidating the forces necessary for meeting health challenges and demands. Thus, EMPHNET aim to strengthen public health systems in the region by connecting with ministries of health, public health institutions, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, the private sector, and other public health agencies in the region and

around the Globe. In doing so, EMPHNET aspires to increase its visibility and strengthen relations with national, regional and international public health workforce.

EMPHNET believes that having well-trained public health workers is essential for ensuring efficient and successful public health programs and regional networks. In particular, EMPHNET considers strengthening the management and leadership skills of public health leaders in the region to be a priority concern. It also believe that strengthening monitoring, and assessing the capacity of public health officials is crucial for measuring the success and impact of programs and projects. More importantly,

EMPHNET seeks to identify appropriate solutions and opportunities for public health leaders and managers to assist them in sharpening their skills especially in evidence-based decision making and program planning and management. As such, EMPHNET delivers services that promote prevention through innovative measures that aim to reduce risk factors. Its approach to achieving better health for the population in the region is multifaceted. Therefore, it attempts to create opportunities that allow integration of research into policy and decision making, and seeks to leverage change by exchanging information, skills and experience. Moreover, Linking, supporting, and strengthening different components of Public Health Systems in the region is one of EMPHNET's central function. By establishing a regional network of public health officers and epidemiologists, EMPHNET optimizes its performance to ensure availability of quality data for building strong public health systems that can improve health outcomes in the region; thus contributing to global health security.

EMPHNET's Values

EMPHNET is driven by a set of core values that guide its work. These values assist EMPHNET in achieving its organizational goals. These values are:

Collaboration is core asset for capturing excellence. EMPHNET honors collaboration and strives to ensure cooperation with stakeholders.

Partnership is EMPHNET's asset for meeting the needs of countries and for seeking opportunities to enable success.

Competence describes EMPHNET's performance. EMPHNET is committed to maintaining the highest standards of performance and adhering to the principles of continuous quality improvement.

Excellence is the essential force that drives EMPHNET's outcomes. EMPHNET strives for excellence. It focuses on productivity and works diligently at improving the quality of its work.

Innovation is EMPHNET's key element for attaining distinctive results. EMPHNET is dedicated to seeking opportunities that introduce new solutions.

Accountability inspires EMPHNET to deliver measurable results and create positive impact through its work. EMPHNET is committed to maintaining effective and efficient governance.

Health Equity is the principal element that inspires EMPHNET's productivity. EMPHNET embraces health equity and believes that health is the fundamental right of every individual. EMPHNET advocates for public health policies and programs that promote fairness, social justice, and awareness.

Working Areas

Applied Epidemiology & Research

EMPHNET aims to build the EMR's capacities in applied epidemiology and public health research. In doing so, EMPHNET works

extensively to strengthen Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETP) by providing technical assistance and facilitating trainings and workshops in different countries the region. In addition, EMPHNET focuses on research application, training, and consultancy, including data analysis, program assessment, and development of data collection systems and registries. These efforts aim to contribute to evidence-based policymaking in the region. As part of a multidisciplinary approach to public health capacity building, EMPHNET is working to integrate health information technology to improve the provision of public health services and create new opportunities for research and analysis.

Non-Communicable Diseases

EMPHNET works on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) to reduce morbidity and mortality of preventable diseases and to contribute to the improvement of health outcomes among populations in the EMR. This is achieved by promoting lifestyle changes within target communities. The status of NCDs in many countries of the region alarms EMPHNET and drives it to seek opportunities to assist countries in reducing the burden of these diseases.



Jordan FETP resident fills an NCD survey in Ajloun

Communicable Diseases

By working in the area of communicable diseases, EMPHNET aspires to reduce the

morbidity and mortality of preventable diseases. More specifically, EMPHNET's goal is to assist countries improve health by interrupting the transmission chains of diseases in EMR.



Polio campaign in Zaatari Camp, Jordan

Health Security

EMPHNET engages in health security-related projects to support initiatives for the prevention of epidemics, early detection of biological and chemical threats, and rapid assessment of disease outbreaks, including emerging and re-emerging infections (natural, accidental, and intentional).

EMPHNET's History

In May 2009, EMPHNET was officially founded as a collaborative platform dedicated to promote public health in the EMR.

The Establishment

EMPHNET's journey started in Kuala Lumpur in 2008, when a bilateral meeting was held during the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Networks' (TEPHINET) Global Conference. During this meeting, the Directors of FETPs from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, met with representatives from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to discuss the need to establish a network that would facilitate and coordinate FETP activities in the EMR. Several discussions followed to develop this initial concept further. In a follow-up meeting hosted in

Amman, Jordan later that year, directors of the three FETPs met along with representatives from the CDC and NAMRU-3. They agreed to establish a regional network with a consensus for having its headquarters office in Amman.



With the FETPs from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan as members, EMPHNET was officially announced and registered in Jordan in May, 2009. Support was provided from TEPHINET to assist EMPHNET in its initial efforts, which were executed solely by Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, who was later mandated with the role of EMPHNET's Executive Director.

In 2010, EMPHNET signed a collaborative agreement with the CDC to support FETP activities in the region. So, with support from the CDC, EMPHNET invested its efforts to broaden its network by embracing the newly developed Morocco and Iraq FETPs in 2010 and Yemen FETP in 2011. EMPHNET also welcomed the FETP in Afghanistan which served Pakistan as well, thus bringing its member countries to eight, by the end of 2011.

Beyond Strategy

In line with EMPHNET's goal to support public health systems in the EMR, EMPHNET decided to grow beyond FETPs by developing relations with non-FETP countries. To this end, EMPHNET started engaging public health officials and entities from non-FETP countries

in its activities, such as Lebanon, Sudan, Tunisia, Palestine, and Bangladesh. EMPHNET further expanded its relations in 2013 when it signed a memorandum of understanding with Afghanistan National Public Health Institute of the Ministry of Public Health, the Sudan Federal Ministry of Health, the Health Authority of Abu Dhabi, the National Institute of Public Health of the Ministry of Health of Morocco, and Jordan MOH, followed by Yemen MOH and Population in 2014.

Bringing Sustainability on Board

EMPHNET invested in its workforce capacity by moving towards organizational expansion. Its staff grew from three members in 2011 to six in 2012, and 22 by the end of 2014. This expansion reflected positively on EMPHNET's involvement in the region. From 2014, EMPHNET took on the responsibility of planning for the future by developing a strategic plan, which set its strategic objectives over the coming five years. This brought EMPHNET many benefits, including the need to change our standard ways of working by focusing on long term growth and sustainability. EMPHNET's underlying approach also changed – from “implement” to “plan”. In support of this, EMPHNET planned to expand and diversify its funding sources, thus successfully signing a cooperative agreement with the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), which is a program implemented by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation Office of Cooperative Threat Reduction. Through this cooperative agreement, EMPHNET expanded its scope of work to address issues of biosafety and biosecurity in the EMR.

As the Syrian conflict evolved into a massive humanitarian crisis in the region, EMPHNET joined the national response efforts in Jordan and in Syria's other neighboring countries. It got engaged in responding to the crisis by

collaborating with the WHO, UNHCR and several international organizations to conduct activities in line with the goals of the Syrian crisis health sector response plan. EMPHNET implemented training courses, field studies, and assessments and continued to engage in activities which support the health status of the Syrian refugees and related host communities.

International Presence

Since its inception, EMPHNET succeeded in developing new partnerships with regional and international entities. For example, EMPHNET continues to collaborate with World Health Organization-Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (WHO-EMRO) to unify efforts in addressing public health challenges in the region, such as IHR, rapid response, and non-communicable diseases. In 2013, EMPHNET entered into a partnership with the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), and it continues to recruit and refer qualified individuals from the region to support the mission of GOARN to pool human technical resources for international outbreak response efforts.

EMPHNET's Core Competencies

EMPHNET defines its core competencies as the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary to the practice of public health. These competencies are essential for effective planning and management of public health programs. They are also necessary for defining general approaches within a context that brings value and high quality public health standards. EMPHNET's core competencies don't stand alone. They blend within the context of its values. These competencies are listed as follows. They are the competencies that bring EMPHNET closer to achieving its mission.

Commitment to Applied Epidemiology

Competent applied epidemiology allows countries to have strong assessment and analytical capabilities by concentrating on the importance of information as a main attribute for bringing about change for delivering evidence useful for decision-making, policy and program development.

Informed Public Health Practice

This is the knowledge of the health status of populations as information is crucial for the practice of public health. Public health practitioners of a country should demonstrate competent knowledge about disease profile, health systems, health equity, disease prevention, health promotion, and determinants or factors that influence health.

Effective Policy Making and Program Planning and Evaluation

Informed policy making and program planning and evaluation are crucial competencies for delivering effective public health practice. This includes management of disease outbreak, designing programs to address public health problems, and implementing appropriate actions and practice guidelines. Competent skills in planning implementing and evaluating policies and programs related to various public health issues and concerns is crucial for creating robust public health systems.

Partnership and Collaboration

Partnership and collaboration are two important components for enhancing performance through shared resources and knowledge. Efficient collaboration in addressing public health issues is essential for influencing the health of populations. Skilled advocacy and team building skills are important factors for facilitating partnership and collaboration.

Networking

Networking is about building connections that are beneficial and lasting in nature. Networking enables public health officers to find and secure knowledge resources that can have an impact on their careers thus advancing public health in countries and the region. Networking can accelerate and sustain success to the individual and the organization.

Information and Knowledge Exchange

Communication and informatics are today's means for success. Competency in managing information to produce meaningful results using information technologies is essential for achieving effective knowledge exchange. In addition, competency in use of information technologies can leverage knowledge exchange strategically by targeting specific audience or groups.

Leadership

Leadership in public health is an essential attribute for communicating strategies and goals. Competent leadership enables dialogue and collaboration. It is a core attribute for directing change and for institutionalizing alternative solutions and strategies. Leadership in public health is crucial for problem solving, decision making and assessments.

Professionalism

Ethical consideration is important for public health practice. Competency in demonstrating ethical choices affects decisions in public health, and is essential for setting high standards of care. Considering ethical choices in the public health profession brings on accountability

Achievements



Highlighted Achievements

Building on its demonstrated success in the launching of initiatives that support field epidemiology, EMPHNET deepened coordination with the CDC and established partnership with BEP and other entities to address topics that include global health security, biosafety, polio and immunization, zoonotic diseases, and surveillance, while further expanding our role in the areas of research and development. These developments and expansion were reflected in EMPHNE's organizational structure, growth of staff, and activities. Organizational Development

By early 2015, EMPHNET evolved to include 25 full time staff members. We continue to bring qualified regional and international experts to support technical, administrative, and logistic development of the organization.

EMPHNET Establishes a Zoonotic Unit

This year, EMPHNET established a Zoonotic unit to handle the Brucellosis project that investigates Brucellosis prevalence in both Jordan and Iraq. This project is implemented in collaboration with the ministries of health and agriculture of both countries and the CDC. In Jordan, the project entails the compilation of a study that looks at the prevalence of Brucellosis spread amongst slaughterhouse workers in three of Jordan's governorates namely; Amman, Karak, and Mafraq. More specifically, the study looks at the correlation between the disease spread and the nature of work of individuals selected for the study. The study population includes Veterinarians, butchers, meat sellers, drivers, livestock transporters, administrative workers, and sanitary workers. Data collection for the study started in June using questionnaires and blood samples.

The prevalence of Brucellosis is also being investigated in Iraq, in an initiative headed by a steering committee consisting of both EMPHNET's team members and specialists from Iraq's ministries of health and agriculture. This steering committee met in June 2015 whereby it highlighted the nature of its work for this project. EMPHNET presented a work plan based on the status of brucellosis

in Iraq as presented by Iraq's representatives. Meeting participants identified the criteria through which they will be selecting two provinces in Iraq for the project implementation, and according to this criteria two provinces were selected. The steering committee also discussed the transportation of the samples for testing and the standard operational procedures to be used for enzyme-linked immuno assay (ELISA) and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests. They modified case definition for the disease and case report forms. The committee set dates for future trainings to be done both in Iraq and Jordan for ELISA and PCR testing as well as other trainings needed for project implementation.

EMPHNET Establishes a Research and Information Unit

This year, EMPHNET also established a Research and Information unit to handle all research implementations by EMPHNET. By forming a Research and Information unit EMPHNET aspires to support projects, ministries and entities in conducting needed researches and studies. EMPHNET believes that research is important for generating evidence to support policy and program development. EMPHNET also believes that research and analysis is important for

measuring success and that the purpose behind doing research is important for it to be meaningful.

During this reporting period, the Research and Information unit at EMPHNET developed its scope and succeeded in providing technical support to several projects in Jordan. Key projects to be handled under this scope include; the Infant Burden Influenza study where EMPHNET participated in the “Infant Burden Influenza Meeting and Implementers Workshop” held in Atlanta in April 2015. The workshop was organized by Abt Associates Inc. and the CDC. The meeting was set to finalize the protocol for a study titled “Infant Burden Influenza in Low- and Middle-Income Countries and the Potential of Prevention through Influenza Vaccination”. The study, aims to assess the burden of disease associated with influenza virus infection among hospitalized infants aged <1 year old in Jordan.

EMPHNET’s Research and Information unit is also providing technical assistance to the Jordan Communication, Advocacy, and Policy (J-CAP) Project to perform data cleaning, analysis and report writing of a baseline survey for a 5-year USAID-funded activity. The survey will feed baseline information to the project that aims to increase demand for and use of modern Family Planning (FP) methods by increasing capacity of government, civil society, and other partners for social behavioral change, policy, and advocacy; and improving the enabling environment for FP programs. Furthermore, the unit has assisted J-CAP during the preparatory phase of the baseline survey in sampling and designing the survey tool and ensuring proper implementation of the survey. The unit also provided technical assistance to the USAID funded “Health Systems Strengthening II Bridge” team in designing of conceptual framework for a comprehensive Maternal Mortality

Surveillance and Response System in Jordan. The framework includes the required policies, procedures, resources, mandates, data models, and a national maternal mortality register.

Using findings from the review of relevant material and from the collaboration with counterparts and stakeholders, the “Health Systems Strengthening II Bridge” team developed a report outlining the Maternal Mortality Surveillance and Response System conceptual framework. The report included technical, operational, and logistic recommendations. EMPHNET’s Research and Information unit has participated in preparatory sessions and it contributed to the report drafting process by offering technical feedback and input. The unit was successful in assuring new work opportunities such as the influenza research project mentioned earlier.

EMPHNET intensifies its response to the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis

As the Syrian conflict evolved into a massive humanitarian crisis, EMPHNET joined the response efforts in Jordan and in Syria’s other neighboring countries. It conducted activities in line with the goals of the Syrian crisis health sector response through the implementation of training courses, field studies and assessments. EMPHNET continues to engage in activities which support the health status of those affected by the conflict in Syria, thus it hired a project coordinator to oversee its projects inside the Zaatari base-camp in Jordan.

Essential Staff Additions

In addition to hiring a Zoonotic Project Manager, Research and Information Team Leader, and a Project Coordinator for Zaatari camp activities, EMPHNET added three project coordinators to its team to support the growth in the volume of its work, and its

expanding areas of expertise. These new team members follow up on the documentation and implementation of projects carried out by EMPHNET. EMPHNET also appointed a Biosecurity Project Manager with a solid background and skills in laboratory management. The year also saw expansions in EMPHNET's finance and administrative team, as it hired a new finance and administrative manager, administrative assistant, an accountant, a budget officer, and a receptionist to oversee the smooth running of operations.

EMPHNET Establishes a Human Resource (HR) Unit

To cater to the needs of EMPHNET's expanding team, EMPHNET also established an HR unit this year. This unit is to handle employee affairs including; recruitment, setting up of incentive schemes, creating professional development plans, and other HR affairs.

EMPHNET Expands its Visibility

During this year we made strides in our efforts to increase visibility. We activated our social media channels namely: Facebook, Twitter,

Google+, and LinkedIn. Furthermore, we launched our new fully-featured website www.emphnet.net. The new website provides a one-stop platform for country field epidemiology training programs, field epidemiologist, specialists, international contractors, donors, partners, policymakers, public health professionals, the media, and our staff to benefit from a wealth of knowledge. From another angle, we launched four editions of our quarterly newsletter which was distributed online to all our members. Finally, we worked on strengthening media relations in order to ensure strong coverage of our news and developments. Recognizing that visibility is an important component of our success, we appointed a Senior Editor to handle these issues. Within our communication department, we worked on securing smoother internal communication and documentation, as the year 2015 also saw the launch of an online-based Document Management System. Finally, and to ensure the smooth running of our internal networks and our IT systems, we appointed an IT officer this year.

Partnerships and Milestones

The Period between October 2014 and September 2015 saw the resuming of existing partnerships and the establishment of new ones.

EMPHNET goes into Fourth Year partnership with CDC

Leveraging on its position as the only registered and incorporated network for the FETPs in the EMR, EMPHNET has implemented a work plan marking the fourth year of Cooperative Agreement with the CDC.

To implement its plans, it has worked in partnership with Ministries of Health (MOH), non-government organizations, international agencies, private sector, and other public health institutions in the region and globally to promote public health and applied epidemiology. Thus we provided professional technical assistance in public health research and applied epidemiology to graduates and residents of the FETPs within our member countries such as; Jordan, Iraq, Pakistan, Morocco, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Yemen FETPs, working with ministries of health as they lead efforts to investigate and respond to outbreaks or unusual health events.

Within a partnership with the CDC, EMPHNET worked to strengthen and focus our effort on improving health systems and outcomes in the region. It worked to address the shortage of trained public health professional in the region in an effort to assist countries in the region to strengthen their public health systems, improve disease surveillance systems, address the epidemiologic transition from infectious to non-communicable disease and cope with the double burden of infectious and non-communicable disease. EMPHNET contributed to strengthening the capacity of public health officers to achieve better management of public health services, while drawing on other expertise at the ministries of health of countries.

For this reporting period the goals through this partnership were to:

- Strengthen and expand applied epidemiology capacity in the region for existing and new programs.
- Improve communication and information sharing among public health officers in the region as well as with international organizations.
- Promote evidence-based decision making by strengthening information and knowledge management.
- Develop innovative approaches in managing common public health problems.
- Promote and foster effective public health networking in the EMR.
- Provide quality training in public health.
- Strengthen field epidemiological activities such as outbreak investigations, disease surveillance, operational research, and conducting interventional projects.
- Improve the epidemiological skills through training

Believing that the fastest way for advancement is through learning from past experiences and the experiences of others, EMPHNET places a high value on knowledge exchange. Through facilitating exchange

programs, and offering opportunities for internships for both its team members, members of medical institutions, educational institutions, and other related entities, it keeps public health professionals informed of the

field's latest developments. EMPHNET also offers research opportunities, and access to data for aspiring researchers.

Therefore one way to achieve better public health for the people of the EMR is to arm field epidemiologists and public health workers with the skills they need to respond to outbreaks, healthcare emergencies, and other challenges typical to this region. Through its collaborations and partnerships, EMPHNET has organized, held, and contributed to many trainings. Here is a summary of its latest achievements in the areas of capacity building and knowledge exchange.

EMPHNET fosters collaborations between Morocco and Tunisia

EMPHNET's goal of improving public health capacity and systems in the region was achieved through collaboration among its member programs and regional and global partners. Within this objective EMPHNET this year, sought to foster collaboration between the Morocco FETP and neighboring countries, such as Tunisia, with the aim of establishing a new FETP for Tunisia. Initial meetings have been conducted in this regard, and this project is still in the implementation stage.

EMPHNET supports FETP Iraq

EMPHNET supported the current and ongoing activities of Iraq FETP by providing technical assistance for mass gathering activities, scientific writing and mentorship. Additionally, EMPHNET supported the Iraq FETP to participate in regional and international workshops and conferences. It provided opportunities for residents and graduates to share their experience and research and to investigation projects.

To strengthen the response to Mass Gathering public health hazards in Iraq EMPHNET provided intensive training to

strengthen the Iraq MOH capacities, and support scientific methodology and evidence-based developments. EMPHNET collaborated with the Iraq MOH to implement this year-long Mass Gathering Project in Iraq. The project included four phases to be implemented sequentially during 2014-2015. The first consensus-building meeting for the project which was held in Amman, Jordan in May 2014, with participants from the Iraq FETP and EMPHNET. The meeting led to the development of a steering committee, a definition of the stakeholders, and a roadmap and timeline for the project. The project comprised an introductory course on public health surveillance in MG, field study projects funded by mini grants, scientific writing trainings for publishing project findings, and national policy brief meetings. This project did not only match the need of Iraq FETPs and public health programs but it also addressed the recommendations from the WHO Iraq's Country Office Report on the Workshop for Health Preparedness at Mass Gatherings held in October 2012.



Scene from introductory mass gathering workshop

The introductory workshop to public health in mass gathering (MG) was conducted in Najaf, Iraq, in October 2014, and was funded by the CDC and BEP. Participants in this five-day workshop were selected on a competitive basis, and included 32 residents and graduates from Iraq FETP, and public health officers from Iraq MOH who are

directly involved in MG activities.

The main objective of this workshop was to strengthen the knowledge of participants about MG surveillance and its related public health topics, and to develop the first draft protocols for field research implementation during the Arba'eeniya MG. Workshop participants suggested topics and ideas for mini-grant to address issues related to MG in Iraq. The output of the workshop was the development of eight draft protocols addressing various aspects of MG-related research topics that will be implemented through a team-based approach with a qualified mentor. EMPHNET provided the technical, financial, logistical, and administrative support for these projects according to the developed timeline.

Following the implementation of the mini-grant projects, a MG policy brief meeting was held in Baghdad in March 2015. The four-day meeting was attended by EMPHNET staff and Iraq MOH officials. Its agenda focused on presenting evidence-based recommendations for improved public health practices during mass gatherings. The meeting focused on converting the results of the mini grant field studies into evidence for decision-making. The MG policy brief meeting was well-received by participants and the panel of MOH officials who on their part suggested that this approach will be taken to address future national health challenges.

The final component of the project included a three-day scientific writing workshop held in Amman in May 2015. The workshop introduced participants to basic structure, formatting and referencing practices used for writing papers published in scientific journals as well as proper searching tools and techniques for medical information and research. Its aim was to familiarize participants with the skills they need to

publish their mini-grant project findings.



Scene from Scientific Writing Workshop

EMPHNET strengthen Yemen FETP

EMPHNET supported the establishment of Yemen's third FETP cohort by providing technical support in carrying out the introductory course. EMPHNET also conducted a workshop to orient mentors and field site supervisors to the FETP during which it highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and field site supervisor. This workshop was held to build a cadre of well-trained mentors who can guide and mentor new FETP residents. This training, was conducted in June 2014, targeting new mentors and field supervisors in whose programs the FETP residents were to be placed for two years. Additionally, EMPHNET facilitated opportunities for FETP residents and graduates to participate in regional workshops, meetings, and conferences.

EMPHNET collaborates with Egypt MOH to strengthen Egypt FETP

This year, EMPHNET worked closely with Egypt FETP to enhance the management and mentoring aspects of the FETP. In doing so, EMPHNET ensured advancement of the FETP support structure thus guaranteeing prominent and highly efficient FETP graduates. During this year, EMPHNET facilitated opportunities to support FETP residents and graduates to showcase their works and strengthen their scientific writing skills through participation in regional

workshops, meetings, and conferences. EMPHNET also conducted a workshop to orient mentors and field site supervisors to the FETP and to the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and field site supervisor. This training targeted new mentors and field site supervisors in whose programs the residents will be placed for two years.

EMPHNET also conducted a five-day scientific writing workshop in Cairo-Egypt in June, 2015. The workshop was held in collaboration with Egypt's MOH. Eleven participants, including FETP residents, FETP graduates, and MOH officials, attended the workshop, which was designed to strengthen scientific writing skills with special emphasis on developing research proposals and protocols.



During Scientific Writing Workshop held in Egypt in year 2015

EMPHNET strengthen Rapid Response in the EMR

Since countries of the EMR are exposed to one type or another of emergencies, disasters or other crises including armed conflicts, epidemics, famine, and natural disasters, effective rapid response is essential. As these emergencies usually involve or lead to a humanitarian crisis, there is a great need for information upon which a rational, effective, and flexible action for the management of public health and humanitarian emergency is based. Public health emergency preparedness and response involves activities directed at

preventing possible emergencies and planning to ensure an adequate response and recovery if an emergency occurs. Recognizing the importance of Rapid Response, EMPHNET worked to expand Rapid Response efforts across the EMR.



Scenes from workshop on Rapid Assessment of Outbreaks of Suspicious origins

During this year, EMPHNET conducted a series of regional training workshop to improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of public health officials to investigate urgent public health events i.e. outbreaks and other public health emergencies; and to assist regional epidemiology staff in emergency public health investigations as members of Epidemiology Rapid Response Team (ERRT).

As such, EMPHNET conducted a five-day Rapid Response Teams training in Amman Jordan, in March 2015. The training was held in collaboration with both the CDC and BEP. Its sessions brought together specialists from the ministries of health of Pakistan, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. The overall goal of this training was to build the capacity of public health specialists working in the region, whereby participants were being trained in areas of public health surveillance, outbreak detection, outbreak investigation, rapid response, disease control and evidence-based decision making. On a larger scale, the Rapid Response Teams training aims to improve capacities of relevant staff working within the region's ministries of health, thus enabling them to work effectively as public health epidemiologists in emergency situations.



Scenes from RST Training

In addition, EMPHNET in collaboration with the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), held a five-day workshop titled “IHR Toolkit for Epidemiologists” between August 8 and August 13, 2015. The event, hosted at the Le Meridian Hotel in Amman brought together Field Epidemiology Training Program residents, graduates, and specialists in the field of animal and Human health Epidemiology from four countries namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco.

The goal of this training was to harmonize the understanding of IHR and practices of current and future epidemiologists in the EMR. More specifically, the course trained human and animal health epidemiologists in techniques for the design and implementation of disease detection and investigation programs, which will serve to improve communication networks between target countries, while improving case detection and response to outbreaks.

In addition, EMPHNET held a five-day workshop on the “Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origin” in Amman-Jordan. The workshop was held in January 2015, with the aim of strengthening field epidemiologists from ministries of health in the region with the skills they need to investigate outbreaks of suspicious origins. The workshop’s sessions were set to enable those in attendance to rapidly detect, assess, and respond to the intentional outbreaks induced by contaminated food and water sources.



Scene from IHR Workshop

Presentations were made on the core capacities of IHR in their detection and response to biological and chemical accidents, the biological and toxin weapons convention, and the steps of outbreak investigation. The event agenda also included study of famous incidents, case studies, open discussions, practical applications, and more.

It is worth noting that this training is the first in a series of activities designed to ensure adequate preparedness and response for the biorisk management in the EMR.

EMPHNET assists in coordinating activities for the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) in Jordan

Similar to other countries in the region, Jordan is prone to emergencies, disasters or other crises including armed conflicts, epidemics, and natural disasters, for which emergency preparedness is essential. Moreover, the health impact of emergencies and crises can be substantially reduced if both national and local authorities are well prepared and are able to reduce the level of their vulnerabilities and the health implications of their risks.

EMPHNET collaborated with Jordan’s Ministry of Health in increasing its efforts and capacity to respond to emergencies, and to fulfill its obligations for the IHR. This was achieved through an assessment, and the

ability to enhance the emergency management of the Ministry of Health in Jordan, and through the development of emergency operations center that is fully functional EOC. The EOC coordinates the response to the Ministry of Natural Health; chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high yield explosive threat; infectious disease emergencies; and health emergencies in the refugee camps. It will also be used as a hub for training and information collection and coordination center.



Scene from EOC Training in Jordan

In October, EMPHNET organized a series of workshops conducted by the CDC to enhance the role of the Crisis Management Unit at Jordan's Ministry of Health to position itself as an authority and a model of all the risks. These workshops were attended by public health officials at the central and health directorate level with the aim of enhancing the role of emergency response and operation in public health in Jordan by fostering the role of the focal points available at the crisis management unit.

EMPHNET partners with CDC to enhance Brucellosis Surveillance, diagnosis and control in Jordan

Over the past few decades, Jordan has achieved a great momentum in the fight

against Brucellosis. However, due to the recent eruption in human Brucellosis in Jordan, the Ministry of Health requested CDC's assistance with implementing a rational brucellosis diagnostic testing strategy, and improving the surveillance of human brucellosis, investigating risk factors and modes of transmission, and creating an evidence base to inform brucellosis control action plans. Currently the majority of human brucellosis cases are diagnosed with a simple agglutination test without confirmation utilizing any additional diagnostics. EMPHNET collaborated with CDC in a project that aims to strengthen capacities in brucellosis surveillance and diagnosis in Jordan.

With support from the CDC, EMPHNET is conducting a study to determine the seroprevalence rate of brucellosis in slaughter houses in Jordan. Results of this report will include recommendations for strengthening measures to control the spread of brucellosis. In June, EMPHNET in collaboration with the Jordan MOH held a one-day training session as part of a Brucellosis study that it is conducting.



Scene from Field Team Training

The field team responsible for the collection of the study's data and blood samples attended this training which introduced

participants to the study tools used for data collection, methods, and best practices for filling questionnaires. The training's session also focused on the collection of blood samples and data analysis.

EMPHNET holds a Round Table Discussion on Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases

EMPHNET, with support from BEP, held a two-day round table discussion on preventing emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, earlier this year. The event was hosted in Amman Jordan, bringing together general directors of public health and primary health care, directors of communicable diseases control departments, directors of animal health departments, and other specialists from the ministries of health of four countries namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco.

The round table discussion was held to improve biorisk management and to identify the best practices related to disease control surrounding emerging pathogens, such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS CoV) and the Ebola Virus disease (EVD). Its sessions defined disease severity ranges, changes in disease infection incidence, and opportunities for improving solutions for patient care. Participating delegates conducted a multipronged country assessment of their respective countries, placing a specific focus on preparedness and response to the emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. They summed up findings and made recommendations for improving biosafety and biosecurity, while dealing with emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. At the end of the two-day event, EMPHNET launched a mini grant projects competition to improve biorisk management concerning emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases in the participating countries. Mini

grant projects will be implemented based on findings of country assessment and recommendations of the two-day round table discussion. This is another incident where EMPHNET encourages research.



Scene from Round Table Discussion

EMPHNET takes part in Joint Mission for Respiratory Surveillance

EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour and Technical Advisor, Dr. Adel Belbaisi, joined the mission which engaged all partners in meetings and field visits to sentinel surveillance sites. The mission visits took place in March, 2015, with a focus on surveillance for acute respiratory infection (SARI) and influenza like illnesses (ILI). The collaboration aimed to support the Jordan MOH in enhancing its national preparedness level against threats posed by influenza, MERS-CoV, and other respiratory pathogens.

EMPHNET strengthens Immunization and Polio efforts in the Region

Polio remains endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Outbreaks of polio occurred in Somalia, Syria, and Iraq during 2013 and 2014, and environmental samples test positive for polio in Egypt and Palestine during the same time period. To contribute to Polio eradication, EMPHNET held in February 2015 a workshop titled "Polio Outbreak Investigation and Response" in Amman, Jordan. The workshop was conducted in collaboration with the CDC, the WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The event brought together 38 participants coming from Jordan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and Iraq. The workshop presented the first step in a series of activities designed to build a Roster of Polio Experts from the pool of human resources available at the regional level within the region. Experts listed on the roster are to investigate and respond to Polio outbreaks, while implementing the “WHO/UNICEF Strategic plan for polio outbreak response in the Middle East.”



Scenes from polio workshop

EMPHNET assists RHAS assess its School Health program in Jordan

The Healthy Schools National Accreditation project has been implemented in Jordan by the Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS) since the year 2008. It is a collaborative work bringing together the MOH and Ministry of Education (MOE) in a shared aim to promote healthy environments within Jordanian Schools. The project is founded on the belief that such settings would reflect positively on students’ physical and social growth, as well as their academic performance, thus it is implemented in line with national health standards. Students within participating schools have also received training so that they best comply with the project’s objectives.

The project standards were developed by a specialized committee from UNICEF, WHO, the Communication Partnership for family Health, the MOH, and the MOE. The project standards assess management and leadership, levels of safe schools environments, levels of healthy school environments, clean schools environments, health education, staff and community participation, health services, social and psychological support, diet, physical activity, and other attributes.

To evaluate the impact of this program, the RHAS was assigned by both the MOH and MOE to assess and survey schools accordingly. To achieve this goal, RHAS solicited technical assistance from EMPHNET to conduct an assessment survey after three years of project implementation. EMPHNET had previously assisted RHAS in conducting a baseline assessment in the year 2012 aiming to assess the status of health in schools prior

to the program’s implementation while comparing findings to the present findings.



Scene from School Health campaign

EMPHNET supports Jordan MOH in preventing and controlling NCDs in Ajloun

EMPHNET, in collaboration with the Jordan MOH, closed out its three-year NCD project in Ajloun, Jordan and handed over the project to the ministry. EMPHNET also prepared a status report describing the project and its different achievements and accomplishments. Spreading over three years, the NCD project in Ajloun managed to gain momentum and status from Ajloun community leaders. The project was implemented to achieve the following:

- Provide an opportunity for Jordan FETP to get involved in NCD project implementation and monitoring
- Create an opportunity for policy makers to translate evidence-based decision making in action
- Design a comprehensive system that uses health promotion mechanisms for targeted NCD prevention and control in Jordan
- Contribute to Jordan's national efforts to prevent and control NCDs
- Promote communication for behavioral change counseling at MOH Health Centers
- Implement a scalable risk factor project for preventing specific NCDs at the community level to be presented as a model for the region

The project gleaned a wealth of information about implementing an NCD project in a Jordanian community setting. It created a momentum for changing physical activity and nutrition behaviors by installing physical activity equipment, building capacity of health providers, producing health education material, supporting healthy walks and healthy kitchen activities and more. Relationships between the MOH and EMPHNET were strengthened throughout the project, both nationally, and at the level of Ajloun governorate.



Community health walk in Ajloun-Kufranja

The nature of the project engaged high level public health leaders in the process of tackling NCDs at a community level. Health leaders in the community also engaged in

the project. Efforts to engage Ajloun Health Directorate and the community health committees that are available at the health centers, in all project activities were maximized to the fullest. These committees included the Head of the health center, NCD specialist, NCD nurse, representatives from the community such as mayor, school Principal and others. The inclusion of the Head of the health center in the planning and implementation of project activities ensured project advocacy, with this person serving as a potent community mobiliser, garnering respect and acceptance of the project in the community.



Activity guide training

EMPHNET attends MediPIET meeting

EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour and team members from EMPHNET attended the final meeting and kick-off event of the Mediterranean Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training (MediPIET), which is a sustainable training program that focuses on intervention epidemiology. The meeting took place in October, 2014. It included a two-year 'learning-by-doing' course that not only trains individuals, but more broadly supports sustainable training infrastructures. The program also supports a regional network of trainers as well as overall capacities in the Mediterranean region. The purpose of the meeting, recently hosted in Tunisia, was to offer a productive space for presenting results derived from the project's preparatory phase (MediPIET 1) while also facilitating the handover of project deliverables to the second phase (MediPIET 2).

WHO-EMRO and EMPHNET Collaborate in NCD Surveillance

WHO-EMRO collaborated with EMPHNET in conducting an "Experts' Workshop on Advising Countries on NCD Surveillance and Developing a Network of Regional Experts". Held in Cairo-Egypt in September, 2014, the workshop's participants included epidemiologists who have worked in the field of NCD surveillance and epidemiological research. Participants came from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen.

The workshop marked the creation of a network of experts to support countries in the region in building and strengthening national NCD surveillance systems. The workshop provided the right platform for building regional capacity in the area of NCD surveillance. This was to be accomplished by reviewing the regional situation of NCD

surveillance and identifying gaps and challenges to be met.



Scenes from Experts Workshop

To achieve these objectives, the agenda included sessions that highlighted the building blocks of the Global Monitoring Framework for NCDs and the use and integration of NCD surveillance data in existing health information systems. Discussions throughout the sessions resulted in recommendations for advising countries on how to improve NCD surveillance. Action steps were identified by expert participants, as well as the WHO, thus supporting the region in strengthening NCD surveillance.

EMPHNET conducts a Mentorship Workshop



Mentorship workshop in Amman

Recognizing mentorship as the crucial component for enhancing the educational experiences of FETP residents, EMPHNET, in collaboration with the CDC conducted a three-day mentorship workshop in Amman Jordan, earlier in November 2014. The event

was attended by FETP resident advisors, residents, and graduates from both Yemen and Iraq.

EMPHNET attends Implementer's Workshop for the Biosecurity Engagement Program

The Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) is a program implemented within the U.S. Department of State. BEP promotes a mission to ensure safe, secure, and sustainable bioscience capacity while reducing global biological threats.

The program leverages technical resources and experts from U.S. agencies, universities, international organizations, and Non-Governmental Organizations in order to meet its core objectives. It operates within three major pillars: biosecurity/biosafety, disease detection and control, and scientist engagement.

As an implementing partner for BEP, EMPHNET attended a two-day workshop in Washington, DC, which provided an overview of current BEP activities, as well as global, regional, and national priorities in bioscience for the upcoming proposal period. This event was held in November 2014.

EMPHNET attends TEPHINET Directors meeting

The Training Program in Epidemiology and Public Health Intervention Network (TEPHINET) hosted its Program Directors Meeting in November, 2014, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The meeting was attended by FETP Directors from the American Region, European Region, Eastern Mediterranean Region, Africa Region, Southeast Asian Region, and Western Pacific Region. Also present were WHO officials, representatives of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO), Chairman of GOARN Steering Committee, representatives of the CDC, representatives

of the European Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training EPIET, and regional public health network representatives.

The objectives of the meeting comprised; holding discussions about TEPHINET activities, setting priorities for the coming year, sharing information, identifying strategies to improve sustainability, and highlighting FETP actions regarding Ebola response.



EMPHNET team during TEPHINET meeting

EMPHNET attends Measles and Rubella Consultants Training

EMPHNET recently made a notable presence at the Measles and Rubella workshop held in November, 2014 in Geneva Switzerland. Sponsored and organized by the WHO, the workshop was positioned to offer an opportunity for consultants with strong technical capacities in fields of training to implement and evaluate practices pertaining to supplementary immunization activities (SIAs).

Issues brought to the spotlight during the five-day workshop included the evaluation of measles and rubella activities in accordance with the Measles and Rubella (M&R) initiative which is a global partnership bringing together the American Red Cross, the CDC, UNICEF, WHO and the United Nations Foundation (UN) to reduce M&R mortality rates. Furthermore, the best practices pertaining to the SIAs were discussed in detail, and post SIA evaluation criteria were identified. Through the workshop's

outcomes, a way forward for the M&R initiative was achieved.

EMPHNET holds a workshop on Severe Acute Respiratory Illness Surveillance

In December 2014, EMPHNET in collaboration with Jordan's MOH held a two-day workshop titled "Severe Acute Respiratory Illness Surveillance in Jordan". The workshop was hosted in Amman Laboratory technicians, infection control practitioners, pediatricians, and internists from the new Zarqa Hospital, Prince Hamzah Hospital, Al Karak Hospital, and King Abdullah University Hospital attended the event.

The workshop provided participants and especially staff working in the new sentinel site of the recently relocated Zarqa Hospital with the skills they need to conduct activities related to surveillance of Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI). Its agenda served to highlight SARI protocol and surveillance protocol using scientific content. Its sessions comprised multiple discussions on essential topics including epidemiological data management and reporting, clinical and laboratory diagnostic procedures, case definition, and the identification of the roles and responsibilities of collaborators and institutions. The workshop included group practice activities aimed at enhancing skills pertaining to the screening of cases, getting the patient approval using the consent form, filling the case investigation report form, and collecting laboratory specimens.

EMPHNET holds Acute Flaccid Paralysis Training for Health Service Providers in Zaatari Camp

In support of the health response to the Syrian conflict, EMPHNET has conducted various trainings for health workers providing services to the Syrian refugee population in Zaatari camp.

The training, conducted in April 2015 at the

Zaatari base camp, focused on surveillance of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) as part of a larger mission to detect, control, and prevent Polio outbreak. EMPHNET's Polio Officer conducted the training session for participants from NGOs providing health services in Zaatari camp. Participants included doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, and others working directly with children under the age of 15.

The training session provided an initial overview of the disease, regional and global situations, and developments in recent outbreaks, and strategies for global Polio Eradication Initiative. Furthermore, the event also focused on how to detect potential cases of AFP and how to refer cases through the proper surveillance system.

EMPHNET Holds Ebola Virus Disease RST Workshop

EMPHNET, in collaboration with the WHO, held a five-day workshop titled EVD Rapid Response Teams (RST) Training. Held in May 2015 in Amman, the workshop brought together 35 participants including; epidemiologists, laboratory experts, prevention and control specialists, and experts of veterinary epidemiology from Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Libya.



Scene from Ebola RST Workshop

The training was designed to build the capacity of participants at national levels, enabling them to effectively investigate and respond to the cases and outbreaks of EVD and other emerging infections. Its sessions

provided an understanding of the role of rapid response teams. They covered topics relevant to epidemiological assessments of outbreaks, case definition and clinical assessment of cases, sample collection, environmental risk assessment, risk communication, and EVD infection prevention and control in health facilities.



Scene from EVD Workshop

The training included a simulation exercise, containing presentations and field work designed by the WHO. Facilitators included specialists from EMPHNET, Jordan MOH, Iraq FETP, Egypt Society of Epidemiology, FETP Morocco, African Biological Safety Association, WHO-EMRO, WHO headquarters, and the Al Bashir Hospital in Jordan.

EMPHNET participates in facilitating training for MediPiet

EMPHNET facilitated part of a Mediterranean Program for Intervention Epidemiology (MediPIET) training titled "Humanitarian Crisis and Mass Gathering" in May 2015. Hosted in Amman, Jordan, the training was held in collaboration with the European Commission, the Consortium National Public Health Institute, the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies and Jordan's MOH. Furthermore, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) took scientific leadership of the training.

The training was designed to provide participants with the epidemiological tools

needed to quantify the degree to which risk factors and humanitarian interventions affect population health in a crisis situation. Participants included MediPIET two-year program fellows and junior or mid-term career public health epidemiologists working at national, regional, or local levels.

The event agenda included interactive lectures, videos, exercises, case studies, and field exercises conducted at the Zaatari camp in Mafrak, Jordan.

EMPHNET Participates in Panel Discussion on "Changing Health Needs in the Middle East and Turkey"

Columbia University's Global Health Initiative at the Mailman School in collaboration with the International Center for AIDS Care and Treatment Programs (ICAP) recently sponsored a seminar titled "Changing Health Needs in the Middle East and Turkey". Held late in June, the event featured panel discussions facilitated by a number of public health leaders from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The discussions shed light on the status of refugee health in Turkey and Lebanon, non-communicable diseases in emergencies, and obesity with a specific focus on changing eating habits and physical activity in Turkey.

The team of facilitators included; Dr. Fouad M. Fouad from the American University in Beirut, Dr. Ozlem Kose from the Istanbul Public Health Directorate, Dr. N. Pinar Ay and Dr. Saliha Serap Cifcili from the Marmara University School of Medicine, and Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour the Executive Director of EMPHNET. Furthermore, Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr and Dr. Miriam Rabkin from ICAP moderated the panel discussions.

Together, the facilitators provided attendees with important insights on refugee health status with a particular focus on non-communicable disease. The event was

attended by 50 field specialists and around 42 interested participants who streamed the panel discussions through web view.

EMPHNET Makes Notable Mark in Jordan's Zaatari Camp

EMPHNET has been attending Jordan's MOH's weekly Health Coordination Meetings, alongside other international organizations.

Many issues are discussed during these meetings, including the implementation of the School Health Program in Zaatari camp. Until recently, there was no school health program implemented in the camp. The program will be implemented in 12 of the camp's grade 1 to 10 schools, and it will benefit 17,000 students, following the decision of the MOH and involving all health organizations working in the camp. Within this program, EMPHNET will be contributing to the immunization of students and the health education programs. Through its work in this program, EMPHNET also donated 12 eye-check charts to camp schools, as it saw that

there was a need to increase the number of eye-check charts available to students. Other organizations will be handling different aspects of the program.

Based on the other organizations' feedback EMPHNET conducted a scientific lecture about the Rotavirus and the latest developments pertaining to the Rotavirus vaccine. This lecture was conducted following Jordan's MOH decision to introduce the Rotavirus vaccine in the epi program and to include Syrian Refugee camps within its implementation. The lecture was attended by 30 participants, all coming from different international organizations working in the camp. EMPHNET conducted another training session about infection control. This session was attended by 33 participants, from different international organizations working in the camp. The training session highlighted the importance of hand washing, alongside other international standards taken as precautionary steps to prevent the spread of infections.

The Future



Working towards a Vision

Governance is increasingly regarded as an important aspect of public health, and in a region like the EMR characterized by ongoing socio-political change, accountability remains key. In light of such conditions, EMPHNET has shown an increased interest in governance. Its need to be accountable is driven by a growing demand for demonstrate response to regional health challenges. Accountability concerns the management of relationships between EMPHNET and its partners, as all involved stakeholders have the responsibility to rapidly respond to the rising health challenges facing this region. In particular, accountability involves: a) having an understanding (either implicit or explicit) of how public health services will be supplied; b) securing funding to ensure that adequate resources are available to deliver services; c) delivering high quality performance in light of challenging conditions; d) receiving and transferring relevant information to evaluate or monitor performance.

Governance in health is a cross-cutting theme, which is intimately connected with issues surrounding accountability. It is important to the strengthening of health systems. In its effort to achieve higher system quality EMPHNET has presented research findings to policy makers and decision makers. In doing so, it has striven to influence decisions and systems for the achievement of better public health. For example, it supported a policy brief meeting earlier this year in Iraq. During this meeting it presented findings of the mass gathering project to decision makers, thus encourage the securing of better health services in MG events. It has also helped in the assessment of community needs. For example, it has assessed the training needs of healthcare service providers in Zaatari camp in Jordan, with aims to build capacities of healthcare workers in the area that will enable them to provide better public health services for this particular population. EMPHNET has also contributed to the School Health program in Jordan earlier this year, by contributing to research that can give educators indicators that will enable them to provide better health environments for students.

EMPHNET has also contributed to Health facility surveys in Jordan, with aims to measure service availability, community management, human resource availability, and adherence to treatment standards and protocols.

Finally, to ensure that its capacity building efforts are on-par with requirements, and that its training sessions are satisfying their desired goals, EMPHNET has been committed to providing channels through which training participants can share their views and suggestions. This year, the after – workshop evaluation system has been automated online, thus enabling all participants to fill in their forms and share their opinions openly. EMPHNET uses participant response to assess the level of their training initiatives and to evaluate how these sessions could be improved for further impact.

Despite the rise in socio-political challenges in the EMR, some important gains in the Public Health status of populations have been achieved. Such improvements are attributed to the advancement of technology, health service delivery and public health programs. EMPHNET in the future will be utilizing the latest technological advancements to contribute to the forwarding of health and risk communication and in turn it will strive to achieve higher standards of capacity building initiatives that will respond to the many challenges facing

this region.

For example, although the region has increasing rates of NCD prevalence. These diseases are driven by factors that include ageing, rapid unplanned urbanization, and the globalization of unhealthy lifestyles. Among the latter are unhealthy diets, tobacco use, lack of physical activity and obesity. They may lead to raised blood pressure, increased blood glucose levels, and elevated blood lipids. EMPHNET sees itself utilizing the latest channels of communication to bring about higher levels of awareness amongst populations and to achieve community change.

Communicable diseases, by contrast, spread from one person to another or from animal to person. The spread usually happens via airborne viruses or bacteria, but also through blood or other body fluids. Among this group of diseases are measles, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, influenza, hepatitis and poliomyelitis. Malaria, tuberculosis and measles are responsible for a significant proportion of the region's morbidity, EMPHNET will be conducting training and research to contribute to the control and prevention of such diseases.

The conflicts afflicting the region have provoked an increase in the incidence of communicable diseases. The wars in some countries such as Syria and Iraq have led to a substantial emigration of doctors, which has added to the problems of already insufficient qualified health personnel. In Iraq, the amount of physicians has been decimated by the continuing conflict. In addition, the conflicts have led to the destruction of a significant part of the health infrastructure in the country. EMPHNET will be working to build capacities of health specialists of this region to compensate for this loss.

Although progress has been made in the health status of mothers and children in most countries in the region, disparities within these countries persist, making this progress inequitable, as has been reported by UNICEF. Most health services in the region are still based on a curative model, which is expensive to maintain and also inefficient in addressing new health challenges. That is why health-care services will have to increasingly include the provision of preventive and promotion services and improve primary health care to attend the most immediate health needs. Although some countries have the economic resources to face this challenge, they have to be redirected in a way to make them more effective.

Because the Middle East region is composed of a diverse mix of countries ranging from very poor ones to wealthy oil exporting countries, there are no solutions that uniformly apply to all of them. Thorough consideration of the situation in each country is needed when planning activities, and EMPHNET sees itself as a linking hub, responding to the needs of healthcare specialists as their countries require and an organization diverse in its outlook and ready to respond to a full range of needs.

Although we managed to grow our stature, our initial priorities remain intact. We will continue to grow our capacity in the coming years with a commitment to make a difference, while continuing to improve public health in the region. This is a challenge that we have accepted with confidence, interest and passion.