



EMPHNET NEWS

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EMPHNET's Word

By: Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, Executive Director

I am pleased to present this newsletter reflecting our achievements during the last quarter of 2014. As we prepared this newsletter, we look forward to a promising year with more achievements to pave our road to success. I take this opportunity to thank our member countries for the high level of cooperation and collaboration, which we believe to be the cornerstone for gaining what we have thus far.

Together, we will continue to work deliberately to seize opportunities that can improve public health in our region. We remain committed to assist member countries in meeting their needs and will search all opportunities to increase the scope of our work and improving our performance. Our top priority is to force change in order to improve performance. I present to you this newsletter with pride and content.

In looking at year 2014, I can say that we managed to strengthen our ties with the countries and increase our prominence in the region. We enhanced our ability to support Field Epidemiology Training Programs by bringing in new people on board. Our main focus was to utilize available resources in meeting the desire to excel and perform within the expectations of our members.

As such, we have delivered planned activities successfully making progress towards widening our scope to serve through a regional context rather than a mere

national one. Moreover, year 2014 allowed us to focus on building new relations and collaborations with several stakeholders who are interested in partnering with us 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, member countries and all other partners and stakeholders.

FETP Accreditation Cycle Opens

TEPHINET launched the FETP Accreditation process which is available on its website. The process will allow FETPs to determine their readiness in accreditation according to a minimum set of standards, agreed upon by the global network.

The Accreditation process will assist FETPs in identifying strengths as well as areas that need improvement. FETPs within the Eastern Mediterranean Region are urged to check on the program manual for accreditation and the online orientation by clicking this link: <http://goo.gl/mI4JB0>

EMPHNET, CDC, and Regional Polio Eradication Partners to Improve Polio Eradication through Establishing a Regional Roster of Polio Experts

In keeping with its mission to improve public health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, EMPHNET, in partnership with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agreed to build a Roster of Polio Experts at the regional level. The Polio Roster of Experts will consist of mid to senior level experts, who will be available for rapid deployment to countries experiencing polio outbreaks. To this end, they will be trained to better investigate and respond to polio outbreaks. Their knowledge of identifying populations at high risk of contracting poliovirus and their skills related to assessment and strengthening of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance will be further developed to meet current field demands. They will work to improve the coverage and quality of supplemental immunization activities (SIAs), and finally they will assist with the introduction of inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) to countries in the region.

Since the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) launched in 1988, the annual number of cases of polio has fallen by over 99%. In 2014, only three countries worldwide remain polio-endemic: Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. However, Somalia, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Cameroon, Syria, Ethiopia and Kenya reported outbreaks of the disease during 2013-2014. Although the outbreaks of polio in Iraq and Syria appear to be under control, the number of cases in Pakistan and Afghanistan so far in 2014 is still higher than the number of cases in 2013. Moreover, the identification of the virus in countries that previously interrupted polio transmission exposes the risk of the spread of the virus from endemic to non-endemic countries. Until poliovirus transmission is interrupted in these countries, all countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) remain at risk of importation of polio.



The occurrence of a case of wild polio in a previously polio free area, whether through importation, laboratory acci-

dent, or mutation of any of the vaccine derived polio virus (VDPV) strains, is considered a public health emergency requiring a rapid and high quality response. Importation of a single case can result in an outbreak of polio, especially if predisposing factors like low levels of population immunity or pockets of unimmunized and/or under-immunized children exist. Notably, responses to these outbreaks are usually costly and time consuming.

After missing the global polio eradication target in 2012, the GPEI partners agreed on a new target and devised the Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018. The “endgame” plan has four major objectives. This new initiative will contribute toward achieving three objectives of this plan which are related to detecting and interrupting poliovirus transmission, strengthening immunization systems, containing the virus and certifying the interruption of transmission.

Where does EMPHNET fit in? EMPHNET proposed the initiative to build a Roster of Experts from the pool of public health personnel in the EMR and started the collaboration between GPEI partners to design and implement the first ever regional polio training. Kick starting this initiative is a five -day training workshop for which participants are selected from an open announcement of the course at the regional level through EMPHNET and partners communication outlets. A total of 42 participants will be attending

this workshop. Experts from WHO, UNICEF, CDC, and EMPHNET will facilitate the workshop’s sessions, which will be held in Amman, Jordan, during February 2015.

Following the workshop, participants will be deployed to the field. Field deployments will be based on the request of (GPEI) Partners at the regional level. The specific assignments will be given as opportunities arise in the months following the workshop and will include activities such as participating in polio outbreak investigation, SIAs training and monitoring, or AFP surveillance review. Hopefully, this initiative will contribute to both the “endgame” plan and the regional response plan, and better represent partners on the polio eradication platform.

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Iraq FETP at a Glance

In collaboration with EMPHNET, and the Iraq Ministry of Health (MOH), the Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program (I-FETP) hosted the Introduction to Public Health in Mass Gathering Workshop in Najaf, October 14th-18th, 2014. The workshop was held under the patronage of the Director General of Public Health Directorate, Director General of Operations and Specialized Medical Services Directorate, and the Najaf Directorate of Health. Representing the first phase of a one-year Mass Gathering project, the workshop was attended by around 50 participants including all officials concerned with Mass Gatherings in Najaf, Karbala, Babel and Baghdad. The main objective of this workshop was to build participants' capacities on different aspects of Public Health in Mass Gatherings including; surveillance of com-

municable, non-communicable diseases, and injuries ,and development of protocols of field projects that will be implemented during the coming Arbaenia Mass Gathering, where the death of Imam Al Hussein is commemorated, in December. The workshop resulted in granting mini awards to the best research proposals submitted following the workshop. Consequently, eight projects tackling different public health aspects relevant to the Karbala mass gathering will be implemented in Najaf, Baghdad, Thiqar, Wasit, Babel, Diwaniya, Karbala, and Samawa. Team leaders for these projects include FETP graduates, while the implementers are the FETP residents. It is worth

noting that this year more than 20 million visitors from within and outside the country participated in Karbala Mass Gathering. Three delegates from eight Public Health officials from the MOH attended a Joint mentorship training workshop held in Amman, Jordan, November 4th-7th, 2014. In addition , the third cohort residents presented their dissertations for achieving their high diploma in Field Epidemiology. The residents had successfully completed their written and oral exams and will celebrate their graduation early in 2016.



Updates from Yemen FETP

Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program (Y-FETP) has been very active over the past three months. The second cohort of residents started their third rotation in October. The rotation will last for four months, sending residents to 12 central ministry programs. Furthermore, the residents presented their first and second assignments in front of the Primary Health Care Deputy Minister in Yemen, with programs directors, deputies, and mentors in attendance. Also in October, Y-FETP residents and graduates were trained to use the Electronic Diseases Early Warning System (eDEWS), and they participated in the Ebola Virus Disease Preparedness meeting headed by the Deputy Minister of Public Health in Yemen. This meeting was attended by representatives from donor organizations namely: Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the European Union (EU), The World Health Organization (WHO), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). During No-

mber, two program staff members attended a mentorship workshop in Jordan. On the sidelines of the workshop, participants also sat for a planning meeting with EMPHNET and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to discuss areas for support. In addition, two measles and two dengue outbreak investigations were conducted by Y-FETP residents in Ibb, Hodeida, and Lahj governorates during November, while the Y-FETP residents and staff participated in the WHO Ebola Assessment Mission November 18-20, 2014.

Y-FETP residents and graduates gave 11 oral presentations and they presented four posters at the Yemen International Congress for Infectious Diseases (YICID) organized by University of Science and Technology in Sana'a December 15th-20th. During the same month, Y-FETP Director and the Technical Advisor organized a preconference workshop on Viral Hemorrhagic fevers and the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) preparedness plan for Ebola. Finally, four Y-FETP residents' abstracts were submitted for the 1st International Conference for Medical Researches (ICMR) organized by 48 Medical Model Compound held in Sana'a December 30th - 31st.



Egypt FETP in the Spotlight



Between October and December, Egypt FETP conducted themed scientific weeks covering various topics related to infection control, public health ethics, occupational health, “Expanded Program of Immunization” (EPI), environmental health, and food safety. Egypt FETP made a notable presence for itself in a series of national, regional and international conferences including: the “Alex Health 2014” conference taking place in October and a meeting that took place in November featuring an abstract on a Malaria outbreak in Egypt to be submitted to the Epidemiology Intelligence Service (EIS) conference of 2015. The month of December saw Egypt FETP also taking part in a meeting on data analysis and the drafting of an abstract on Brucella to be submitted to the 2015 EIS conference. FETP residents also participated in the design and implementation of cross section survey on the Coronavirus alongside the Malaria outbreak in the Red Sea Governorate during October. Analysis of survey data was completed in December. The team also conducted a site visit to the Inter-

national Emerging Infections Program (IEIP) for data collection and protocols development to plan follow up procedures for travelers arriving from countries currently transmitting Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) by constructing preparedness and response. E-FETP residents were also actively involved in the National Polio Campaign from October to mid-December, and they participated in Ebola outbreak response activities held in Liberia. During December, field activities included preparations for the assessment of Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) sentinel sites and the devel-

opment of a questionnaire in collaboration with WHO. Other activities included updating the International Health Regulation (IHR) report and participation in the four-way linking taskforce meeting conducted by the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) to give recommendations on prevention and control of H5N1. Furthering the topic of Ebola, E-FETP collaborated with the WHO in assessing the preparedness and response plan of the Ebola virus. E-FETP residents also participated in the routine monitoring and evaluation of NEDSS (National Electronic Disease surveillance system) in the Menia Governorate.



Pakistan FELTP Gets Involved in Ebola Preparedness Activities

On October 23rd, 2014, following the request of the Pakistan Army, the Pakistan Field Epidemiology Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) conducted a one-day training workshop on Ebola Preparedness in Pakistan. The training was held in collaboration with the Pakistan Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute (AFPGMI), and was attended by 128 public health professionals from the Pakistan Army and select civilian institutions. The workshop’s training material was collaboratively developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and Medicines Sans Frontières (MSF). Participants came from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Kharian and Lahore hospitals. The workshop was inaugurated by the Deputy Surgeon General of Armed Forces, Maj Gen Asif Mumtaz Sukhera.



EMPHNET Participates in WHO EMR Regional Committee 61st Annual Meeting

EMPHNET attended the World Health Organization (WHO) 61st annual meeting of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean which was held in Tunisia during October 19-22, 2014. The event was attended by representatives from each of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) Member States and WHO Regional Director for the EMR, Dr. Ala Alwan. During the meeting, the Regional Directors' annual report for the year 2013 was reviewed. The report highlighted the progress made in areas pertaining to the eradication of poliomyelitis, the tobacco-free initiative, and the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals. It also covered the regional strategy for the health sector's response to HIV for 2011-2015, and maternal and child health.

Technical discussions were held on global health security. These discussions focused on challenges and opportunities regarding International Health Regulations, as well as emergency preparedness response. Technical papers were presented on non-communicable diseases. WHO-EMRO for this year invited non governmental bodies that include regional networks associations and other public health entities from the region. Awards were also handed out during this meeting including: the Dr. A.T. Shousha Foundation Prize and Fellowship, the State of Kuwait Prize for the Control of Cancer, the Cardiovascular Diseases and Diabetes in the EMR Prize, and the Down Syndrome Research Prize.

EMPHNET Supports Mentorship Workshop

Recognizing mentorship as the crucial component for enhancing the educational experiences of Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents, EMPHNET and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hosted a three-day mentorship workshop in Amman, Jordan, commencing November 5, 2014. The event was attended by FETP resident advisors, residents, and graduates from both Yemen and Iraq. Its agenda combined both practical training sessions and presentations highlighting the characteristics of good mentorship practices. CDC Senior Epidemiologist and Resident FETP Advisor Dr. Robert Fontaine commenced workshop proceedings by highlighting the essential activities carried out in line with FETP goals, FETP activities, and the proper ways of executing such activities. This session was followed by a presentation given by the Resident Advisor to Yemen FETP, Dr. Mohamed Qayad,

who outlined surveillance report guidelines and the reviewing process for such reports. Dr. Fontaine stated that the mentor should ask his/her mentee questions that generate reasoning and logical thinking thus eliciting solutions to challenges. The second day of the workshop comprised a review of the planned study guide to be followed by FETP residents. These reviews were then followed by practical implementation of the steps outlined in the guide. Furthering the practical aspects of the workshop, the third day included presentations prepared by participants to highlight proposed activities that can be implemented by FETP residents, with emphasis on the role of effective mentorship in implementing activities.



A Word of Thanks

EMPHNET thanks all country programs for the valuable and informative contributions they have made to this issue of our newsletter. Such contributions enrich the content of this publication, as they shed light on the great work these programs are doing for the service of public health. We look forward to seeing more great contributions in the issues to come.

EMPHNET Supports CDC and Jordan MOH Efforts to Organize EOC Orientation Sessions

EMPHNET supported the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH) by organizing a series of orientation workshops targeting Jordan's MOH directors and officials. The workshops were geared towards helping the MOH establish Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) in Jordan. The workshops comprised a three-day orientation workshop in Amman targeting 49 MOH Directors, a one-week workshop in Aqaba targeting eight MOH Directors and Officials from Southern Governorates, and a one week workshop targeting 14 MOH Directors and Officials from the Northern and Central Governorates. Held between October 21, 2014 and November 6, 2014, the workshops aimed at orienting decision makers on the functions of EOCs. Key figures attending from the MOH included Head of Emergency, Dr. Bashar Rashdan and his

assistant, Dr. Mahmoud Kayed. The EOC workshops were enriched by presentations provided by CDC experts James Banaski, Jr, MS, MEP, CEM and Daniel Brencic, MPH. Representing EMPHNET were Dr. Jawad Mofleh who gave a presentation on evidence-based decision making during emergencies, and Dr. Adel Belbaisi who spoke about risk assessment and the International Health Regulations 2005. As part of the workshops' proceedings, participants were involved in both breakout and plenary tabletop exercises. Additionally. Two field visits were arranged for participants to see the emergency operations at current sites. More specifically, visits were made to the Aqaba Civil Defense and the National Centre for Security and Crisis Management.



EMPHNET Attends TEPHINET Directors' Meeting



The Training Program in Epidemiology and Public Health Intervention Network (TEPHINET) hosted its Program Directors Meeting between November 13-15, 2014, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The meeting was attended by Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) Directors from the American, European, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, Southeast Asian, and Western Pacific Regions. Also present were World Health Organiza-

tion (WHO) officials, representatives of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO), Chairman of the Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN) Steering Committee, representatives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), representatives of the European Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training (EPIET), and regional public health network representatives including: The African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET), the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET), and SAFETYNET. Presentations held during the event focused on platforms used by programs to share information about their activities and accomplishments, highlighting ways that TEPHINET can assist in improving scientific conferences and information sharing. The third day of the event included meetings held by regional networks, following which each group presented an overview of the programs implemented in their respective region. The EMR group included Dr. Abdulha-

keem Alkhoolani from Yemen, Dr. Ibrahim Iblan from Jordan, Dr. Biagio Pedalino from Morocco, Drs. Sahar Elshoubagy and Mai Abdel-Moneim from Egypt, and Ms. Samar Abdelnour from EMPHNET.

Overall, it was concluded that the FETPs hold a global significance in strengthening public health. The meeting was successful in that it provided an opportunity for all programs to exchange ideas and provide insight on several issues of concern. It also presented a good opportunity for FETP Directors around the world to meet.

EMPHNET Supports Workshop on Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI)



EMPHNET in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) held a two-day workshop titled “Severe Acute Respiratory Illness Surveillance in Jordan”. The workshop was hosted in Amman December 7-8, 2014. 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. Key figures in attendance included: Director of Communicable Diseases in the MOH, Dr. Mohammad Al-Abdallat, EMPHNET’s Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, alongside General Director of the New Zarqa Hospital, Dr. Ahmad Bani Hani.

The workshop provided participants and especially staff working in the new sentinel site of the recently relocated Zarqa Hospital with skills needed to conduct activities related to surveillance of Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI). The SARI Sentinel Surveillance System in Jordan was originally established in 2008 as part of the regional network supported by Naval Medical Research Unit-3 (NAMRU-3). EMPHNET affirmed that its support for the workshop stems from its belief that influenza is a recurrent worldwide concern that has caused high morbidity and mortality in the past.

It is worth noting that the new Zarqa sentinel site is the fourth one to be established after the sentinel sites in the King Abdullah University Hospital, the Prince Hamzah Hospital and Al Karak Hospital. The new Zarqa Hospital is now officially one of the Jordan’s National Influenza Centers designated by the MOH and recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO).

EMPHNET Continues to Support the NCD Project in Ajloun



The last three months saw more developments in the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) project in Ajloun. Adding a different flare to healthy lifestyle practices, Rajib Health Center organized a wellness day activity in nature. The event, supported by EMPHNET, targeted elderly citizens from the area. Organized as a collaborative effort by the Rajib Charity Society and the Rajib Health Center, the event saw an attendance of 40 of the center's senior NCD patients. With transportation provided by the Charity Society, the group went to Um Qais for a day trip on November 8, 2014. For many, this was their first trip to the area. Surrounded by the scenic views that the historical site provides, the participants sat for an open discussion about health topics related to

NCD's. During these discussions, many patients cited social and cultural constraints as the main reasons preventing them from having regular checkups at the center. However, two women broke all cultural barriers and shared with other participants their success stories battling hypertension and diabetes respectively. This event marked a major development in the Ajloun NCD project, proving that people are now more open to sharing their stories as inspiration for others in similar situations. The event included healthy walk and healthy kitchen activities, proving that health could also be entertaining. This was the first activity of its kind to be held by the health center.

A week later, the health center of Al Wahadneh held a wellness day activity. The event was organized by the Al Wahadneh Health Center and was hosted at the Princess Basma Center, with support from EMPHNET. Its agenda included a lecture conducted by Dr. Laith Al Najdat, who spoke about healthy lifestyle practices that can help cure and prevent NCDs. The event also helped bring local communities together with healthy walks and healthy kitchen activities, and EMPHNET highlighted the proactive role it played in spreading NCD awareness within Ajloun's local communities.

