



### Headlines:

- ◆ Conference summary
- ◆ Pre Conference workshops
- ◆ Round tables, oral and poster presentations
- ◆ Evaluation, feedback, comments, and photo gallery

## Third EMPHNET Regional Conference - 2013



### EMPHNET's Word

By: Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, Executive Director

EMPHNET's Third Scientific Regional Conference becomes increasingly important for echoing the quality and prominence of the field epidemiology work that is being done in the region. The outstanding representation from the eight regional Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; KSA, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Morocco, clearly illustrates the merit of these programs and the positive effects of these FETPs on improving the public health situations for the populations they serve.



From the shared experiences of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), to the humanitarian and emergency situation with the Syrian refugees this conference not only provided an opportunity to share experiences and exchange information but it also illustrated that our region is dealing with serious public health challenges amid a backdrop of challenging political, noncommunicable diseases, new initiatives in surveillance and social crises; and that work is being done successfully yielding great achievements.

I am delighted to present this special post-conference newsletter, which serves as a testimony to the excellent work and efforts from our region. Once again, the FETPs have shown us that their work is scientifically grounded and that their level of commitment towards contributing to public health improvement is genuine and solid. Therefore, I commend all the FETP residents and graduates who contributed to this conference and hope that those who were not fortunate to present their work at this conference, a better opportunity in our next regional conference.



**EMPHNET**

The Eastern Mediterranean  
Public Health Network

**Third Scientific Regional Conference**

NEWSLETTER ISSUE #13

Dec 4-7, 2013

# Summary

## The Opening

EMPHNET officially began its Third Regional Scientific Conference on Wednesday, December, 4th, 2013 with an opening ceremony that included speakers from Morocco Ministry of Health, EMPHNET, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET). The conference was officially announced when Mr. Chtibi Lahcen, Inspector General at Ministry of Health, Morocco, welcomed the attendees on behalf of His Excellency the Minister of Health. The opening ceremony kicked off the three-day conference that included plenary sessions on MERS CoV, and other



important public health issues. Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour welcomed the attendees and highlighted the significance of the conference and the importance of gathering FETPs from different countries in sharing knowledge and experience. The Director of Morocco FETP, Professor Abderrahmane Maaroufi, who is also the Director of Epidemiology and Disease Control at the Morocco Ministry of Health, welcomed the attendees and wished the conference success.

## Background

The regional conference is a main activity that EMPHNET conducts biannually in a different country each time. The conference mainly aims at bringing together epidemiologists from different countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and representatives from international organizations with distinguished experience in this area. The interaction and exchange of experiences aim at enriching and expanding knowledge amongst conference attendees. In addition, EMPHNET considers the conference as an important opportunity for creating linkages between attendees thus serving as a means for creating channels of communication that will eventually enhance field epidemiology and drive public health forward in the region.





### Theme

EMPHNET's Third Regional Conference was held in Marrakesh, Morocco between December 4th and 7th, 2013. The theme chosen by the Scientific Committee for this conference was "Public Health Surveillance in the 21st Century". The conference was held to highlight global public health issues with particular emphasis on communicable and non-communicable diseases that pose as vital concern for most of the participating countries. The overall objective of the conference was to provide FETP residents, graduates and other interested parties with an information exchange platform and a forum for sharing experience and research in specific areas of public health.

The conference sessions ran over a period of three days with topics in communicable and non-communicable arenas. All in all, there was 4 pre-conference workshops, six round table discussion sessions, 28 oral presentation sessions, and 2 poster presentation sessions.

There were 176 participants representing KSA, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, UAE, and Sudan. Attendees also included representatives from CDC, TEPHINET, World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Georgetown University, and other international subject matter experts.

### Abstracts

A total of 147 abstracts were submitted to the conference website (141 regular submissions and 6 late breakers). Following abstract evaluation by the Scientific Committee, 89 abstracts were accepted for oral presentation and 29 for poster presentation.





# Workshops

## **Workshop 1: “Public Health in Humanitarian Emergencies: Epidemiologic Method”**

During the conference, EMPHNET and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted this workshop on “Public Health in Humanitarian Emergencies: Epidemiological Methods” focusing on challenges during humanitarian emergencies and use of epidemiological methods in emergencies.

This workshop designed to face the man-made and natural disasters continue to be a major threat to health and human security across the globe; their frequency and scale of impact has been increasing in the past few decades.

Attendances of the workshop were 30 participants from current FETP residents, who are working in countries affected by emergencies, and graduates of FETPs in EMR region.



## **Workshop 2: “Building a Cadre of Epidemiologists to Enhance the Detection and Validation of Emerging Disease Outbreaks”**

In this workshop participants were trained on the importance of the surveillance capacity despite limited budgets, public health practitioners increasingly rely on non-governmental, non-official, and non-traditional sources of information, such as articles in the local press or media, reports from individual clinicians or field-based NGO staff, and Internet-based sources such as blogs and social media. Many of the newest and most rapid means of communication – such as SMS, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook – are accessible only via digital media. TEPHINET, ProMED, HealthMap, and SKOLL Global Threats Fund (SGFT) are developing innovative global systems to gather and interpret such event-based “informal” surveillance information and make it available to epidemiologists around the world.



Bridging this gap in access to digital disease detection information and training likely represents the greatest opportunity to reduce public health response times to new outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases. Most epidemiologists in the best position to discover and validate new disease outbreaks have had no formal, systematic, or measured exposure and training to contemporary, rapid digital disease detection approaches.

26 participants attended this workshop from FETP residents, graduates, and field supervisors working in communicable & noncommunicable diseases, and from different countries. This workshop was headed by Dr. Marjorie Pollack MD- Deputy Editor, ProMED-mail.



**Workshop 3: Strengthening NCDs FETP Field Projects in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

This workshop aims to improve NCDs related fieldwork for FETP residents in the region. As well as Jordan presented FETP NCDs pilot program experience, highlight best practices from NCDs coordinators across the region, and share the latest NCDs training materials and guidance from CDC. This workshop skilled participant on how to tailor specific FETP requirements for NCDs needs, showcase high quality investigations and NCDs field projects, and discuss appropriate placements, mentorship, and projects for residents.



28 participants attended this workshop from FETP residents, graduates, and field supervisors working in NCDs from different countries. Countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have an increasing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). This workshop was headed by Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour – Executive Director, EMPHNET.

**Workshop 4: “Epidemiological Surveillance – Data for Action”**

In most countries data on infectious diseases are collected on basis of national law. Reporting is done by laboratories and doctors and the data then often is forwarded to the national level through different public health authorities. This workshop was conducted by Robert Koch Institute Germany, focusing on the importance of Epidemiological Surveillance as the on-going systematic collection, analysis, evaluation and dissemination of health data for the purpose of planning, implementation and evaluation of disease control measures.



This workshop highlighted that many factors influence the quality of surveillance systems. Very helpful evaluation schemes and criteria have been developed. But the efforts taken at all levels to collect the data can only be justified if collected data result in action. Analysis and dissemination of the data as well as the use of the findings for implementing or adjusting public health measures are required. This can and should be done at all levels in the public health system.

Attendees were 29 epidemiologists, FETP residents, graduates, managers from Ministries of Health, and other qualified public health officers from various countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region working in the areas of surveillance.



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# Round tables

There were six roundtable discussions at the conference discussing Non-communicable Diseases, MERS-Co, Syrian Refugees Crisis, importance of effective communication between veterinary and human health surveillance, surveillance data for action, and digital disease detection.

The conference began with a plenary session on the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome: Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). In this session, Dr. Mammmur Malik from WHO, Dr. Farida Al Hosni from UAE, Dr. Ahmad Abu Salih from Jordan, Dr. Danial Lucey from Washington university, and Susan Gerbar from CDC, updated the conference participants on the current situation and historical perspective of MERS-CoV. Dr. Malik emphasized that much work has been done to understand MERS-CoV but that many more questions still exist in order to fully understand this virus.

An important round table session at the conference was led by Dr. Mohannad Al-Nour, Genessa Giorgio, Dr. Mohammed Tarawneh, Dr. Faris Lami, and Dr. Mohamed Qayad that which focused on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the region. This session stressed the importance of focusing on NCDs especially in line with the high level of governments' commitment to prevent and control these diseases. The Jordan experience in focusing on behavioral change and community engagement was presented.

Dr. Andreas Glisdorf, Dr. Jawad Asghar, Dr. Pierre Nabeth, Dr. Faris Lami, and Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, managed to deliver a round table about data collection, assessments, surveys and surveillance systems which are commonly addressed topics in the region. However, use of evidence in formulating policies and making decision remains lagging behind. This issue was the heart of a round table discussion that carried the title of "Surveillance data for action". The main purpose of this round table was to bring into focus the use of epidemiological data into strengthening, enhancing and improving public health practice.

Bringing new approaches to systematically capturing information on diseases, the round table discussion titled "Digital Disease Detection" focused on the role of epidemiologists in discovering and validating new disease outbreaks. During this session Dr. Marjorie Pollack, Dr. Dionisio Herrera, and Dr. Mark Smolinski, Director of Global Health Threats (Skoll), addressed the gap in disease reporting specifically in relation to new outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases. This session presented access to digital disease detection information and training likely represents the greatest opportunity to reduce public health response to emerging new disease outbreaks.

Carrying the title "importance of effective communication between veterinary and human health surveillance", during the third plenary session focused on One Health Initiative as an issue of regional importance. Dr. David Elliot from Defense Science and Technology Laboratory, UK and Dr. Keith Hamilton from the WHO for Animal Health presented effective communication between veterinary and human health surveillance as a valuable approach in responding to the continued rise in zoonotic disease in the region. It is important to note that Zoonotic diseases comprise a big portion of human burden of infectious disease. It is not only human and animal health which is being affected by the zoonotic diseases, as every year individuals, families and nations suffer from huge economical loss due to zoonotic diseases. Hence it is important to build communication bridges between human and animal health authorities, in order to detect the diseases early and reduce risk of transmission to humans, thus preventing human and animal loss. The discussion generated by this session was both informative and thought-provoking given the illustrated benefits of a one health approach in surveillance that was provided by the presenters.

Another round table discussion that received high interest from the conference participants was that which focused on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. This session was managed by Eva Leidman, Susan Gerber, Dr. Faris Lami and Dr. Ahmed Abu-Salih brought onto the platform countries and organizations exposed to the effect of the Syrian crisis. These shared their experience, relevant knowledge, lessons learnt and recommendations.





# Presentations

## Oral Presentations

There were 28 oral presentation sessions delivered in a concurrent layout over the three days of the conference. These included a wide range of topics relevant to both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Topics for these presentation delivered experiences and field investigations in the areas of; Emerging Infections, Respiratory Diseases, Water Borne Diseases, Zoonotic Diseases, Surveillances Evaluation, Non Communicable Diseases, and others.

## Poster presentations

The conference included two poster presentation sessions. The 27 posters presented by FETP residents and graduates in the areas of Emerging Infections, Respiratory Diseases, Water Borne Diseases, Zoonotic Diseases, Surveillances Evaluation, Non Communicable Diseases and others.

## Outstanding Presentations

As a tradition, EMPHNET presented an award to the best oral and best poster presentation. Selection of these are based on an evaluation process that examines the oral presentation in relation to content, presentation layout and delivery. Alternatively, poster presentations are evaluated for content, appearance and presentation. Three evaluators are assigned to evaluate each of the sessions. Scores are entered, checked and computed to give a final average score for each presentation. The presentation that receives the highest score receives an award that is presented in the closing ceremony.

Best Oral Presentation was awarded to Dr. Eman Eldesouky from Egypt for her presentation titled: "Sentinel Site Surveillance for Severe Acute Respiratory Tract Infection (SARI) Egypt 2011-2013".

Best Poster Presentation was awarded to Dr. Asaad M. Asaad, Iraq FETP 2nd Cohort Resident, for presenting findings of Hepatitis A Outbreak in a Syrian Refugee Camp in Iraq, December, 2012

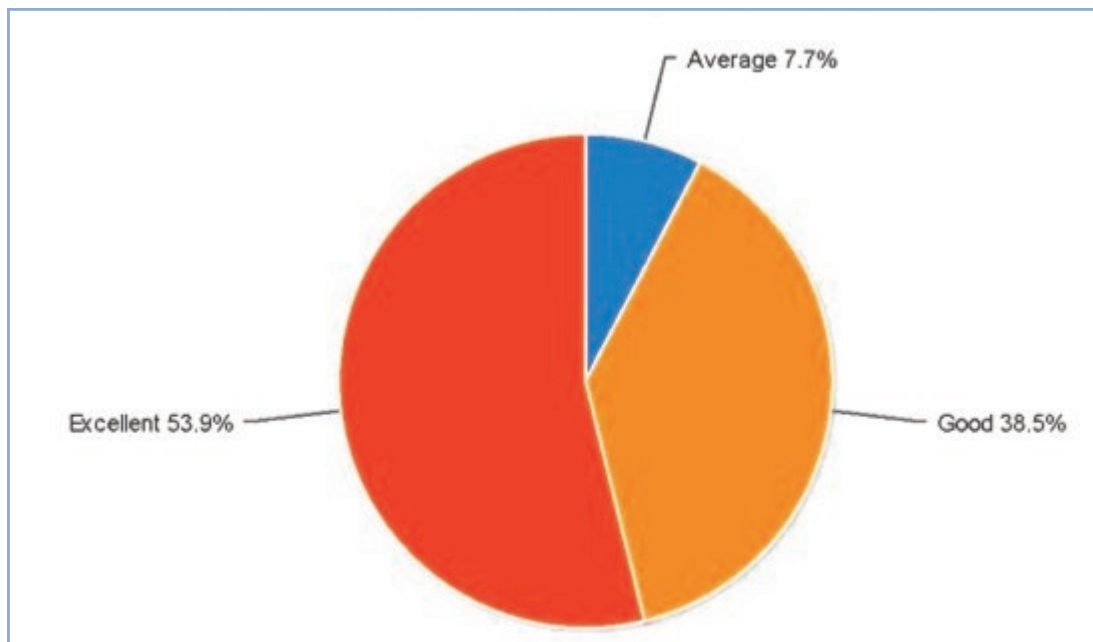


# Feedback

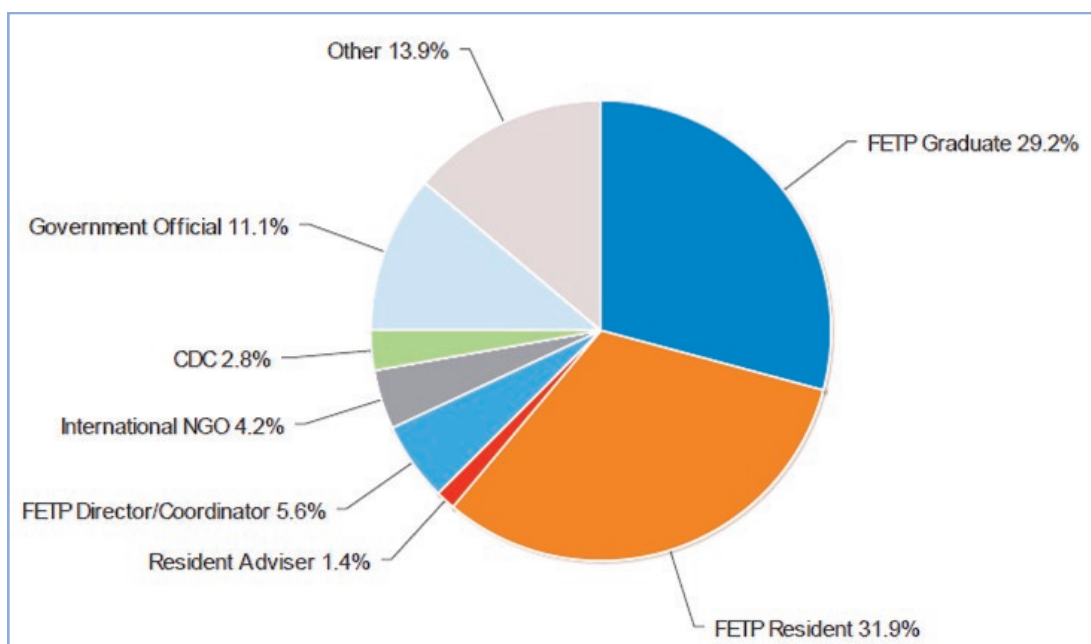
## Participant Feedback

An online evaluation of the conference was done using *surveygizmo.com*. Overall results were very positive marking a successful achievement for EMPHNET.

### 1. Overall rating of the conference



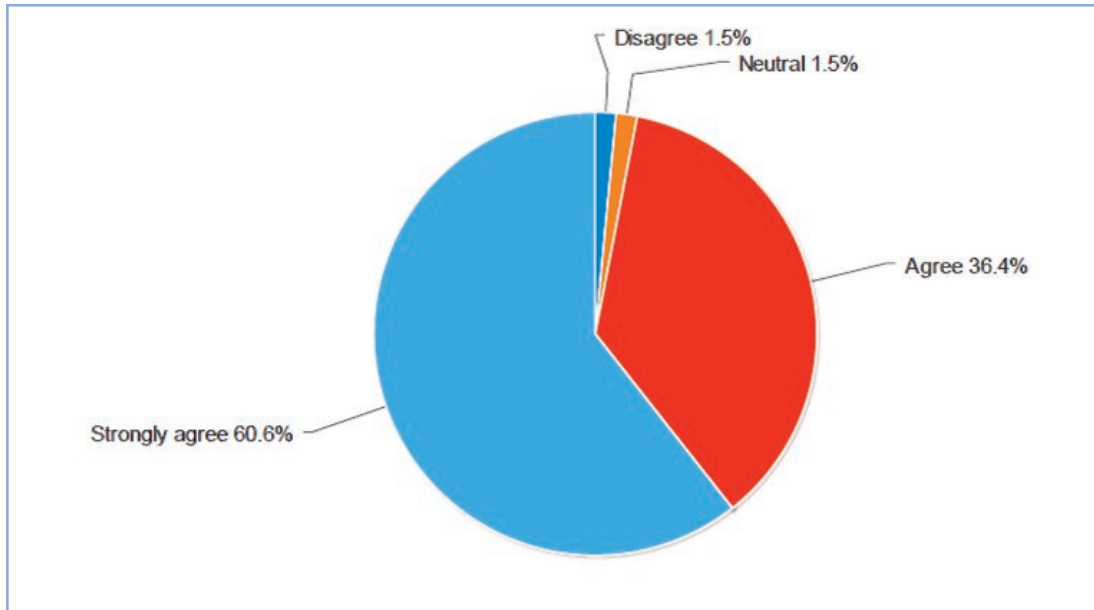
### 2. Affiliation



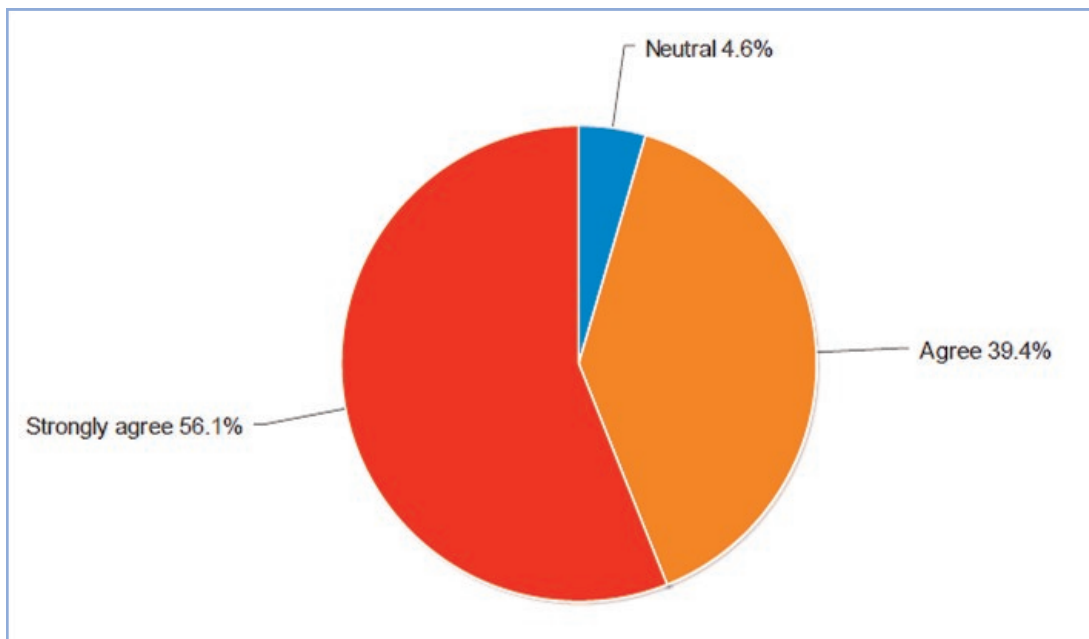




**3. I learned something new/useful/helpful**



**4. General conference arrangement were adequate**







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# Photo gallery

