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EMPHNET's Word By: Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, Executive Director

Looking at the positive results achieved in our Fourth Regional Conference, I feel great pride for all what we have accomplished to date and I also feel optimistic when I think of the important milestones we are yet to celebrate in the next quarter of our fiscal year of 2015-2016.

The Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference provided the ideal platform for fostering excellent collaboration between FETPs, along with other public health experts. It not only succeeded in creating dialogue opportunities between different FETP residents and graduates, public health scholars, and officials around the EMR, but it also demonstrated that the FETP residents and graduates are contributing to a wide array of public health fields through their research.

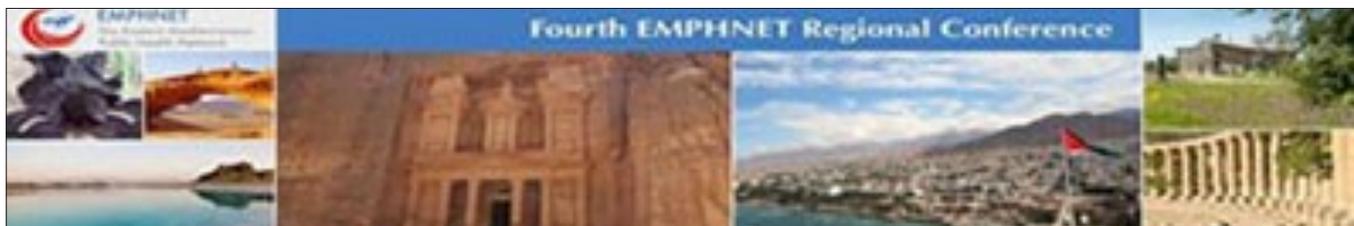
The conference reiterated the need for countries to work on initiatives to introduce more untraditional methods of public health surveillance, to collaborate and share experience in surveillance methods, and to ensure availability of information for Public Health Professionals.

In conclusion, I viewed this conference as an opportunity to bring the work of many FETP residents and graduates, as well as global public health professionals into the spotlight.

It was a valuable payback for the hard work and dedication that FETP residents and graduates put into their work, as well as an opportunity for like-minded individuals to meet and share experiences within an educational setting.

On this occasion, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the conference's success, and I especially would like to acknowledge our member countries for their positive input in this event. The energy and motivation of our FETP residents and graduates continues to play a critical role in EMPHNET, and this conference, in particular, thrived on the valuable input of our FETPs.

I would also take to pay tribute to the FETP Directors and Resident Advisors for their continuous support and commitment. With your enthusiasm, contributions, and commitment, I am sure that we will have more achievements to celebrate together in the future.



Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference Commences with a Grand Opening

The Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference commenced with an opening ceremony held on the evening of September 28th, 2015. The ceremony was held under the Patronage of His Excellency, Jordan's Minister of Health Dr. Ali Hyasat. Its proceedings kicked off, with welcoming remarks provided by EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour. In his remarks, Dr. Al-Nsour stressed on the conference's role as a highlighter of the health challenges facing public health implementers in the region, as well as the opportunities that the event provides for knowledge and experience exchange between countries. Further remarks were also delivered by Dr. Abdelwahed Al-Sorouri, on behalf of Dr. Hakeem Al-Kohlani, Chairperson of the Conference Scientific Committee, Dr. Bassam Hijawi from the Jordan Public Health Association, and Dr. Dionisio Herrera, Director of TEPHINET.



From his end, Dr. Kashef Ijaz, Principal Deputy Director of the Division of Global Health Protection at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), gave a presentation during the ceremony about Global Health Security. During his presentation, he stressed on the important role played by FETP residents and graduates for securing better public health in the EMR.

Furthermore, Dr. Haidar Otoum, Irbid Health District Director, spoke on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Ali Hyasat, whereby he noted that despite the burden of non-communicable diseases facing Jordan, the Kingdom had implemented successful immunization, sanitization and awareness programs to achieve more comprehensive preventative medical coverage. Finally, Mr. Sharhabeel Madi, on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Hani Mulki, Chief Commissioner Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), welcomed the participants to Aqaba.



The conference's opening ceremony was also attended by EMR's FETP programs, members of the EMPHNET Board of Directors, FETP Resident Advisors, and public health officials. The ceremony ended with the screening of a short film about EMPHNET followed by a garden reception and a folk show from Jordan.

EMPHNET Fourth Regional Conference Sees Four Preconference Workshops

With the aim to enhance the educational value provided at the Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference, four pre-conference workshops were held prior to the conference. These included a two day workshop titled “Promoting Cradle to Grave Security of Biological Samples”, a workshop titled “Contemporary Issues on Public Health Emergencies”, a third workshop titled “Polio Eradication in MENA Region: Experience and Challenges”, and a fourth workshop titled “Innovative Surveillance and EpiCore”. More details are provided about each workshop below.

Workshop on “Promoting ‘Cradle to Grave’ Security of Biological Samples”



The Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference featured a two-day pre-conference workshop titled “Promoting Cradle to Grave Security of Biological Samples.” Held on September 27th and September 28th 2015 in partnership with the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), the workshop was attended by 32 field specialists coming from Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Morocco, and Jordan. Its sessions were designed to respond to the increasing biological threat from emerging and reemerging infectious diseases and bioterrorism.

The workshop addressed the necessity for governments around the globe to increase awareness and preparedness for identifying and containing infectious agents that can be used against civilians. The topics the workshop covered were related to sample security, “Cradle to grave” sample management, medical waste disposal, the definition of biological agents and toxins, as well as the introduction to IATA shipping regulations, amongst other pressing topics.



The workshop stimulated important discussions on Biosafety and Biosecurity as well as the safe handling of biological hazardous material, while also increasing participants understanding of biorisk management system: risk assessment, risk mitigation, and performance management.

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Workshop on “Contemporary Issues on Public Health in Emergency”



tive discussions amongst various experts and organizations attending the workshop.

Workshop sessions covered issues related to the Syrian crises, natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies, public health priorities, and essential indicators in emergencies. Discussions focused on the human rights based approach to programming was discussed in great detail, and facilitators also gave a brief introduction to risk assessment and surveillance.

More than 30 Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents and graduates, public health officials, and humanitarian workers attended the workshop. Participants included specialists coming from Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Jordan, USA, UK, Lebanon, and KSA, while its team of facilitators included experts from regional and international entities.

Holding the title “Contemporary Issues on Public Health in Emergency”, this workshop, held on September 28th 2015, was designed to build the capacity of public health practitioners working in the area of public health emergencies in the countries of Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). The workshop highlighted the epidemiologic methods used in complex humanitarian emergencies such as rapid health assessment. More specifically, it shed light on health and nutritional priorities in emergencies, while employing a human rights-based approach to programming, monitoring and evaluation. Its sessions aimed to improve the capacity of relevant ministries of health staff working in emergency preparedness and response.

Combining presentations and interactive discussion, the workshop’s objectives were to familiarize public health professionals in the EMR with the contemporary knowledge of public health in emergencies and to enable them to effectively respond to and manage public health humanitarian crises. Its sessions also offered an opportunity for participants to share the experience, knowledge, information, and lessons learned about humanitarian emergencies in the region, while opening the floor for construc-



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 contributions in the issues to come.

Workshop on” Polio Eradication in MENA Region: Experience and Challenges”

In a workshop titled “Polio Eradication in MENA Region: Experience and Challenges” held on September 28, 2015, participants updated their information regarding the global and regional polio situation. The workshop sessions highlighted outbreak investigation and response strategies adopted for the polio in Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR).

More specifically, the workshop served to update participants on the global and regional polio situation, to discuss the Endgame Strategy, to review polio eradication strategies adopted in the EMR, and to discuss routine immunization and Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs) as main strategies for polio eradication.

The workshop’s facilitators, all of whom were experts from international and regional entities, engaged participants in discussions on the global and regional status of polio, AFP surveillance, investigation and response to polio outbreak, AFP case clustering, and polio eradication challenges faced in the MENA region.

More than 20 Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents, graduates and public health officials working in the area of polio eradication attended the workshop.



The participants came from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Jordan. Together they discussed the challenges as well as the progress made on the Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018. It is important to note that since launching the Global Polio Eradication launched in 1988, the number of cases of Polio has fallen by over 99%, thus falling from 350,000 to 359 cases.



To watch a short documentary about EMPHNET titled “EMPHNET at a Glance” go to:

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRhsgu5-yuY>

To watch the live streaming of the conference and conference videos tune in to EMPHNET’s YouTube Channel

 <https://www.youtube.com/user/EMPHNETJO>

Workshop on “Innovative Surveillance and EpiCore”

Conducted on September 28, 2015, the “Innovative Surveillance and EpiCore” workshop was held in partnership with the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET). Its sessions were attended by 32 Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents and graduates coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, and Pakistan.

The content presented responded to the fact that the majority of “real-time” initial disease outbreak reports are now based on “open source” media including press reports, clinical reports, and Internet-based sources. From their end, facilitators stressed that tapping into these resources presents a great opportunity to reduce public health response times to new outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases. In response to such developments, the benefits of the new EpiCore platform, developed as a joint venture between the Skoll Global Threats Fund, TEPHINET, HealthMap, and ProMED-mail were highlighted. More specifically, the platform was positioned as an effort to leverage the field expertise of FETP alumni and to help find outbreaks faster through utilization of nontraditional information sources.



The workshop’s objective was to engage FETP residents, graduates, and alumni in discussion about participation in the EpiCore platform. The sessions also shed light on perceived challenges from such participations, possible solutions, and ways for engagements to be increased.

The team of facilitators, coming from international entities, conducted the workshop with the aim of enabling participants to recognize how the EpiCore platform contributes to addressing a surveillance gap. They transferred to participants the skills they need to identify challenges and possible solutions for participation in the EpiCore Platform, and how knowledge of the EpiCore Platform functions can be passed on to other specialists. With sessions combining informative presentation and practical application of concepts learned, the workshop concluded with a clear set of instructions on how to use the EpiCore Platform.

Conference Participants Gather for Four RoundTable Discussions

The event program included four roundtable discussions led by regional and international experts. The discussions held within these sessions aimed to orient the conference participants to some of the pressing public health issues facing the EMR.

Roundtable Discussion on ‘Public Health in Emergency

The opening roundtable session titled, ‘Public Health in Emergency’ was led by Dr. Farah Hussein from CDC, Dr. Nada Ward from WHO and Dr. Abdel Wahed Serouri from Sana’a University-Yemen. It explored possibilities for improving the capacity and mechanisms of regional Rapid Response Teams in their ability to address public health crisis.



Roundtable Discussion on ‘Regional Readiness to Meet International Health Regulations Core Capacities by 2016’

The roundtable session ‘Regional Readiness to Meet International Health Regulations Core Capacities by 2016’ was led by Dr. Claire Standley GWU, Dr. Pierre Nabeth from WHO, and Dr. Wael Hyahneh from the Jordan University of Science and Technology. This roundtable brought participants up to speed on efforts made to meet compliance with the International Health Regulations by 2016, as these regulations will help standardize an increasingly multi-lateral and international disease response system.



Roundtable Discussion on ‘Promoting “Cradle to Grave” Security of Biological

The roundtable session titled ‘Promoting Cradle to Grave Security of Biological Samples’ was led by Dr. Annoud Khreis from Princess Haya Biotechnology Center PHBC Dr. Clair Standley George Washington University, and Dr. Tareq Sanouri from EMPHNET. This roundtable served to strengthen the capacity of public health responders to protect against both accidental and intentional contamination incidents from the dangerous biological samples collected during outbreak response.



Roundtable Discussion on ‘Employing “One Health” as a Field Epidemiology Approach’

The roundtable session titled ‘Employing One Health as a Field Epidemiology Approach’ was led by Dr. Erin Sorrell from GWU, Dr. Jamal Wadi from Jordan Hospital Medical Center, and Dr. Elizabeth Hattingh from the U.S. Embassy in Jordan. It focused on the importance of and integrating human, animal, and environmental health into consolidated, and more effective, public health solutions.



Oral and Poster Presentation Highlights in Numbers



The Conference Scientific Committee received 205 abstracts from 12 countries all from within the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Reviewers then selected the top 131 abstracts from 12 countries for oral and poster presentations. More specifically, 100 abstracts were selected for oral presentation and 31 abstracts were selected for poster presentation. The 131 oral and poster presentations occurred in three oral and two poster presentation sessions.

42.7% of the abstracts submitted were on communicable diseases in general, and outside of communicable diseases, 20.6% of abstracts were on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), 5.3% of the abstracts submitted were on mother,



child and reproductive health, 12.2% were on surveillance evaluations, 6.1% were on mass gathering health, 4.5% were on mental health, and 8.4% of the accepted abstracts were on other categories.

Among the abstracts on communicable disease, six abstracts were on respiratory diseases, five were on food and water borne diseases, 15 were on vaccine preventable diseases, six were on Hepatitis, seven were on Tuberculosis, 12 were on zoonotic and vector borne diseases, and three were on other communicable diseases. Generally seven abstracts were accepted on Measles under the communicable disease category: five from Pakistan, one from Iraq, and one from Yemen. Seven abstracts on Hepatitis (A, B and C) were also submitted, three from Iraq and four from Pakistan. Researchers from Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan and Sudan also presented on topics including immunization capacities, gastroenteritis, and both acute and severe acute respiratory infections.

The non-communicable diseases track had the second highest number of abstracts submitted; eight out of 27 abstracts were about diabetes: four were submitted from Iraq, and one each from Morocco, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Eight out of the 27 abstracts were about cancer, with seven from Jordan and one from the UAE. Other topics covered by presenters from Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Morocco included; obesity, hypertension, water pipe smoking, and pulmonary disease.

Under the category "Others", a broad range of topics were covered by presenters, including injury reporting, unnecessary injection practices, medical staff training, patient satisfaction, and chemical poisoning. Presenters from the UAE, Yemen, Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq conducted these presentations.

Sixteen abstracts were about surveillance system evaluation. FETP residents and graduates from Pakistan presented nine of these abstracts, with two presenters each from Yemen, Iraq and Morocco, and one presenter from Jordan. Abstracts in this session focused on the evaluation of different surveillance systems in the presenters' respective countries.

Conference Participants Enjoy an Evening of Fun and Entertainment

Following sessions filled with knowledge and the fruitful exchange of experience, the conference attendees socialized in a less formal setting. On the evening of September 29th, 2015 the participants all went on a boat trip where they enjoyed scenic views of the red sea at sunset. They were given a sea tour of Aqaba's historic attractions. The tour ended in the Berenice Beach Club, where the participants enjoyed a night of barbecue set against the backdrop of live entertainment and dancing. This evening of fun was enjoyed courtesy of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, which on its part reflected the true sense of Jordanian hospitality.

Announcement

It was decided during the Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference to make this event an annual fixture in EMPHNET's calendar. Therefore, EMPHNET is happy to announce that its Fifth Regional Conference will be held in October 2016 in Turkey. Stay tuned for more details.

EMPHNET Makes Technological Leaps

The conference saw several technological leaps, as it was EMPHNET's first conference to utilize technological advancements to their fullest, while also making strides in areas of visibility and publicity.

Abstracts were submitted through an online abstract submission system, where three independent reviewers were assigned to each abstract. In total, 62 reviewers from the region and outside the region reviewed the abstracts. Each reviewer scored the abstract assigned to him/her using pre-identified criteria. Scoring was submitted through an internet based system that utilized the PERCENTRANK function, with 50% as the percent rank set to accept abstracts for oral presentation and 30% as the percent rank set to accept abstracts for poster presentation.

EMPHNET Used live streaming of the opening ceremony and the round table discussions. Up to date coverage was also provided on EMPHNET's social media channels, while traditional media outlets including Jordan Television (JTV) provided a day to day coverage of the event. One on one interviews were made with guests and key figures in attendance. Prior to the conference, EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour was also featured on JTV's Morning Show Yawm Jadeed, while JTV provided an in-depth report about the conference and its highlights. See the TV interview with EMPHNET's executive director Dr Mohannad Al-Nsour here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssE1IU929Y4>

EMPHNET Hosts Her Excellency Somalia's Federal Minister of Health Dr. Hawa Mohammad

EMPHNET hosted Her Excellency Somalia's Federal Minister of Health Dr. Hawa Mohammad who stressed, during an exclusive interview with the press, on the importance of strengthening ties between Somalia and other countries in the EMR. She confirmed that such ties will help re-build the country's health infrastructure which, at present sees challenges, following a decade of civil war. Dr. Hawa Mohammad shared with conference attendees statistics about the health status in Somalia, whereby she stated that one in seven pregnant women die while giving birth, and one in five children dies before reaching the age of five in Somalia.

She further added that her country has 600,00 recorded cases of malaria and 200,00 cases of malnutrition. She also stated that 60% of Somalia's women and 50% of its children suffer from anemia, not to mention other health problems such as the scarce availability of hospitals and health centers, the absence of skilled doctors, the absence of health services in some areas, alongside other challenges. Dr. Hawa Mohammad confirmed that despite the absence of Vaccination programs in some of its areas, Somalia has been polio free since the year 2013, which is, in her opinion, an achievement in itself.



From another angle, Her Excellency Somalia's Federal Minister of Health particularly emphasized on the importance of fostering collaborations between Somalia's government and the ministries of health in the region, stating that such collaborations will help Somalia's patients get the treatment they need. Her Excellency Dr. Hawa Mohammad also added that aspiring doctors in Somalia should be given scholarships to study in the universities of the region, in hopes to improve their capacities and better serve their local communities.



The Closing Ceremony

During the conference's closing ceremony, held on October 1st, 2015, organizers recognized Dr. Eshraq Al-Falah, from Yemen's FETP, for her presentation titled: "Analysis of four injury-reporting data sets at the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Interior – Yemen, 2012", granting her an award for "best oral presentation". The best poster presentation award was presented to Dr. Abid Saeed, from Pakistan's FELTP, for his presentation titled: "Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) Case Investigation Report 13th August 2013, District Quetta, Balochistan".

Awards were also given to the winners of the EMPHNET FETP Photo Contest whereby, Mumtaz Ali Khan of FELTP Pakistan took first place, Akbar Ali Ghnaghro of FELTP Pakistan took second place, and Dr. Badr Alnaeme from FETP Iraq took third place. FETP Directors were presented with awards of recognition for their contribution to the conference's success.

The closing ceremony featured a speech by Her Excellency Somalia's Federal Minister of Health Dr. Hawa Mohammad who spoke about the health situation in Somalia and the need to foster more collaborative efforts between Somalia and other countries in the EMR in an effort to re-build the country's health infrastructure following a decade of civil war.



All in all, the Fourth EMPHNET Regional Conference facilitated excellent collaboration between FETPs, along with numerous public health experts at the regional level. During the conference closing Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour announced that this event will be occurring manually, and that the next EMPHNET Regional Conference will be held in October 2016.

To read more about EMPHNET's Fourth Regional Conference go to

<http://conferences.emphnet.net>



The Conference in Photos

