

# EMPHNET NEWS

## Newsletter Issue 16

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## EMPHNET's Word

By: Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, Executive Director

As I look through the pages of this newsletter, I feel delighted with what we have accomplished over the past three months. I feel proud of how far we have come with regard to our goals. We made a commitment to work on supporting the FETPs, on building strong epidemiological capacities, and contributing to the enhancement of public health arenas in the region. Today, these goals are still very solid. We remain devoted to strengthening and expanding applied epidemiology in the countries we work within and we continue to seek every opportunity to spread knowledge and enhance skills.

This newsletter edition presents a wide range of topics. It gives a full coverage of several regional trainings that we had supported and successfully completed in this quarter including; the "Public Health in Emergencies" targeting Iraq FETP Residents and the NCD Experts Workshop held in Cairo in collaboration with the WHO-EMRO. EMPHNET was also present in several regional and international conferences including; the FETP Global Seminar of Atlanta Georgia, the World Congress of Epidemiology held in Anchorage, Alaska, and the MediPIET Meeting of Tunisia. Such international engagements offered us fruitful opportunities for the healthy exchange of information.

From another angle, our country programs have been effectively and positively enhancing public health standards and practices regionally, and in this issue we are proud to highlight the achievements made by the Yemen FETP, Morocco FETP, Egypt FETP, and Pakistan FELTP. EMPHNET has also spearheaded several health investigations, and in this issue we high-

light its involvement in the investigation of school health in Jordan, and Jordan's Post-Polio Campaign investigation.

In line with our knowledge-sharing efforts, we are moving forward in the establishment of an e-learning program, upgrading our website, and maintaining an active presence on the social media.

As always, my hope for EMPHNET is that we can continue to invest in partnerships that can promote the growth of our FETPs. We remain committed to working with partners towards strengthening their capacities. After all, we believe that the FETPs play a vital role in the advancement of regional public health, as each program remains an asset to our success.

EMPHNET has come a long way since its establishment, and I am confident that we are bound to achieve much more with the support of our partners and our team. We will continue to realize our mission to promote better health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, as we have taken on a proactive approach to make health information available to the masses.

*Within our hard work and aspirations, we find our opportunities*

## Morocco FETP at a Glance



Established in the year 2010, the Moroccan Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) saw all ten of its FETP third Cohort residents successfully graduate last July, receiving both a Master title and a certificate in Applied Epidemiology by the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC, US).

All third Cohort graduates were appointed in different positions in the Morocco Ministry of Health (MOH) at both national and regional levels, occupying roles that give them the opportunity to use their newly acquired skills.

From another angle, current FETP residents presented the results of their applied epidemiology projects, which they completed under the guidance and supervision of senior staff from both the ENSP (National School of Public Health) and the Ministry of Health (MOH). The topics presented responded to the priorities of the MOH, ranging from the “Evaluation of the impact of the introduction of rotavirus vaccine on the hospitalization for acute gastroenteritis” to a “Seroprevalence study to assess the prevalence of Brucellosis and Leptospirosis in the Casablanca region”.

The project findings were presented as one poster at the Adelfi-Epiter conference, held in France last September, and they will also be presented as 3 posters in the European Scientific Conference on Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology (ESCAIDE) next November (2015) in Stockholm.

New challenges and opportunities await the Morocco FETP, as its next cohort will include 20 residents who will start their epidemiological adventure in January 2015.

## Yemen FETP in Focus

The Yemen FETP was active between July and September 2014. Here are the updates

- 12 Second Cohort residents completed their second placement in the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MOPH) programs namely: Electronic Disease Early Warning System (eDEWS), Measles Control Program (MCP), Integrated disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR), National Malaria Control Program (NMCP), National TB Control Program (NTP), National Central Public Health Laboratory (NCPHL), National Oncology Center (NOC), Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI), Central Veterinary Laboratory, School Health Program (SHP) and Tobacco Control Program (TCP).

- The Second Cohort residents have finalized their second deliverables that cover three surveillance system evaluations (for eDEWS, NTP, NMCP) and nine surveillance systems data analysis for: Hepatitis B, animal rabies, Tuberculosis, IMCI, IDSR, TCP, NOC, SHP, and NCPHL.



- FETP residents and graduates participated in H1N1 outbreak investigations in Hareb Baihaan district, Mareb, Yemen, Q4 2014. Three deaths were reported where the index case came positive for H1N1 by real time PCR. Ten probable, 5 suspected and 43 contacts were interviewed and 10 samples were collected and sent for laboratory confirmation.
- Residents also participated in an active house to house search for measles cases, while also taking part in the post measles campaign coverage evaluation in Arhab districts, Sana'a governorates. This came into effect, following a measles outbreak that has been reported during Q4 2014.
- A one-day training course was conducted by a Technical Advisor TA for Y-FETP residents on epidemiological studies. The aim of this course was to provide the residents with an overview of different study designs, while highlighting the strengths and weakness of each.
- 15 Y-FETP residents and graduates participated in an outbreak investigation training in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, between September 22nd and 26th, 2014, following the infectious disease outbreaks occurring in Yemen. The MOPHP relies on FETP residents for the investigation of such outbreaks. Therefore, it is essential that the FETP residents master how to conduct outbreak investigations. Although the residents had received basic training on the subject, the purpose of this training was to provide Y-FETP residents with the core principles of outbreak investigations on vaccine-preventable diseases, food-borne outbreaks, vector-borne diseases and others.

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## Egyptian Team of Specialists Speak About Diabetes Mellitus at FETP Global Seminar

Dr. Sherein El Nossery, who is a Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) graduate and Medical Epidemiologist at the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) gave a presentation on “Diabetes Mellitus in Egypt” on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2014. She presented alongside Coordinator of the FETP at the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit of MOHP Egypt Dr. Amgad El-Kholy, and Team Leader of FETP Eastern Mediterranean and European Regions Dr. Robert Fontaine. The presentation was given at the FETP Global Seminar hosted at the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

The content presented in this session reflected the weight placed by the Egyptian MOHP on combating non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In her talks Dr. El Nossery revealed the findings of a STEPwise survey conducted during the years 2011 and 2012. The survey revealed that 17% of the Egyptian population had high fasting blood glucose levels. 6.4% of the sample studied were on medication for diabetes. 70% of the diagnosed diabetics were smokers. 62% of the diabetics ate one serving unit of fruit and vegetables daily, and 29.8% were engaged in moderate intensity physical activity. 80% were overweight (BMI  $\geq$  25) and 43.6% had family history of diabetes. 38.6% of diabetics sought medical care within a year, while only 1.7% of them had eye examination and 2.6% had feet examination as part of their medical assessment

## EMPHNET and Jordan MOH Conduct Post-Polio Campaign Evaluation in Jordan’s Refugee Camps

Although Polio was eradicated from countries in the Middle East during the 1990s, the re-emergence of the disease was recently reported in the region when an outbreak was detected in Syria, affecting 17 children. In the same year, wild Poliovirus was identified in environmental samples from Egypt, Israel, West Bank and Gaza, and the most recent cases of the disease were reported in Iraq in April, 2014.

In response to the 2013 outbreak in Syria, a major regional vaccination campaign was implemented. Within this campaign, 22 million children under the age of five years were vaccinated in seven countries and territories in the Middle East region. In Jordan, a national vaccination campaign was conducted, with special focus on the large populations of children residing in Syrian refugee camps.

The Polio Eradication Initiative in Jordan, which is a collaborative effort administered by the Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), facilitated the most recent Polio campaign inside of the Syrian refugee camps in Jordan. This was done in line with the National Immunization Days (NID) initiative. The Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) was administered, with the most recent round of vaccinations offered between June 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

During the four-day campaign, 18,000 children under the age of five received immunization in Za’atari refugee camp, while approximately 1,350 children aged five and under received immunization in Azraq refugee camp, and 1000 children followed in Mrajeeb al-Fhood refugee camp.



To evaluate the coverage of the campaign, the Jordan MOH alongside other partners of the Polio Eradication Initiative in Jordan requested that EMPHNET conduct a post-polio campaign evaluation.

The findings revealed that the OPV coverage as a result of the Sub-National Immunization Day in both the Za’atari and Azraq camps were considered acceptable with an overall coverage exceeding 95%. Children who did not receive vaccination during this period were either not in their homes or tents at the time, or they were sick.

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## Pakistan's FELTP Contributes to the Compilation of WHO's First Hepatitis E Manual

The World Health Organization (WHO), alongside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other entities including the Pakistan Field Epidemiology Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) all joined forces to produce the first of its kind manual on Hepatitis E outbreaks. This manual provides information about methods used for investigating outbreaks of Hepatitis E, while also listing measures used for prevention and control. It also serves as a reference source about the causative agent – known as the hepatitis E virus (HEV), while offering a description of its epidemiology and the clinical manifestations of the disease.



The manual will be of use to those who are involved in planning and executing responses to Hepatitis E outbreaks. It serves field specialists working in communities or refugee settings. The manual also offers valuable information to public health authorities and health-care workers.

## US CDC Delegates Meet with EMPHNET and FETP Resident Advisors



A team from the CDC visited EMPHNET in Amman Jordan. The visit was aimed at reviewing the current status of EMPHNET's activities which are supported by the CDC, as well as agreeing on activities and timelines for the upcoming year. FETP Resident Advisors of Iraq-Dr. Faris Lami, Morocco-Dr. Biagio Pedalino, Pakistan-Dr. Rana Jawad Asghar, and Yemen-Dr. Mohamed Qayad attended the meeting, which was held between July 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014. In an unprecedented undertaking, the meeting provided an opportunity to share updates, exchange views, and com-

municate concerns regarding the needs of country programs. It offered an opportunity to discuss details and peculiarities that challenge implementation of activities in each country.

Another significant function that drove this event was the handing over of the EMPHNET project to the new Public Health Advisor, Mr. Youness Elhamidi. This was facilitated by the contribution of Ms. Genessa Georgi who played a central role in passing on essential knowledge about the project to Mr. Elhamidi, while reflecting on the roles and responsibilities of EMPHNET and the Resident Advisors in accomplishing planned activities.

## EMPHNET Hosts Workshop Titled "Public Health in Emergencies" for Iraq FETP Residents



Between August 17<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 2014, ten graduates from the Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) and five Ministry of Health (MOH) officials participated in an Emergency Response Workshop titled "Public Health in Emergencies". Held in Amman, the workshop targeted Field Epidemiologists working on Emergency Response related to the Iraqi Internally Displaced People (IDP) crisis and emergency situations. Its sessions were held in coordination with both EMPHNET and the Emergency Response and Recovery Branch (ERRB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Muireann Brennan and Dr. Farah Husain from the CDC along with Morocco Resident Advisor- Dr. Biagio Pedalino, and Iraq FETP Resident Advisor Dr. Faris Lami.

The purpose of this workshop was to cover epidemiologic methods used in complex humanitarian emergencies such as: rapid assessment, surveillance, population estimation, and survey design. Additionally, the workshop touched on other public health concerns such as nutrition, mental health, mortality, mapping, while highlighting their relevance to the IDP crisis in Iraq.





## EMPHNET Gains Recognition as a Facilitator for Better Health during 20th Edition of WCE

The 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Epidemiology (WCE) was hosted in Anchorage Alaska between August 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 2014. Its agenda included meetings for each region in the world, and one such meeting placed the spotlight on the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). This meeting was moderated by Regional Councilor and Epidemiologist Dr. Salim Adib. In it, the role of EMPHNET as a facilitator for better health for people in the region was highlighted. In a presentation given by FETP Coordinator and Member of EMPHNET Board of Directors Dr. Amgad Al Kholy, EMPHNET was further recognized for strengthening collaboration, networking, advancing public health resources in the region, and strengthening capacity building, research and knowledge sharing. Dr. Al Kholy also presented the achievements made by Egypt's FETP. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's FETP achievements were presented as examples of effective epidemiological training. From his end, Dr. Salim Adib also gave a presentation on the activities carried out in the EMR in relation to the IEA. He also led discussions on future epidemiological activities to be held in the region.

## Iraq FETP Holds Training to Conduct Independent Assessment of Polio Activities in Iraq

The Iraq FETP was requested by the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (WHO EMRO) and the Iraq Ministry of Health (MOH) to conduct an independent assessment of Polio activities in Iraq, following two reported cases of Polio in Iraq earlier this year. To carry out this task, a number of Iraq FETP graduates attended a one-day training session. The training, hosted in Amman on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, was held by three Polio experts. It included presentations on the standard methodology to be adopted, using the assessment tool, and the protocol. The main aim of the assessment was to determine if the activities implemented in Iraq fall in-line with WHO recommendation for post outbreak period

The team assigned for this investigation developed a work plan comprising a detailed timetable for implementation and submission of final reports. More specifically, the investigation was set to commence mid-September 2014.



## EMPHNET and RHAS Investigate School Health in Jordan

EMPHNET was assigned by the Royal Health Awareness Society RHAS to conduct an assessment survey for The Healthy Schools National Accreditation project that has been implemented in Jordan for the past three years. EMPHNET had previously conducted a baseline assessment in the year 2012 aiming to assess the status of health in Jordan's schools prior to the program's implementation.



The Healthy Schools National Accreditation project is a collaborative work bringing together the Ministry of Health (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.



Coming soon

EMPHNET's new website is now under construction, stay tuned.

## EMPHNET Supports 1KM Healthy Walk in Kufranjah, Ajloun - Jordan

Pushing the journey towards better health forward, Kufranjah's community Health Committee collaborated with the Hasan Comprehensive Health Center, the Kufranjah Youth Committee, and EMPHNET to organize a 1km healthy walk. The walk aimed to reinforce the health benefits of physical activity while introducing members of the community to the different exercise equipment available at the health center.



From his end, Technical Assistant to Ajloun's Director of Health Dr. Hamid Abu Obailah said that this event falls in line with the Ministry of Health's aims to engage local community members in health promotion activities. He further added that holding such events will help raise health awareness.

Director of the Hasan Comprehensive Health Center Dr. Adawiya Hmoud stated that this event highlights the positive role that health awareness plays in creating healthier communities. Believing that knowledge is power, EMPHNET's Technical Advisor Dr. Adel Belbaisi introduced event participants to the different health equipment available to them at the center, explaining further how each apparatus contributes to weight loss and the combatting of obesity.

## 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) in Tunisia this September. MediPIET is a sustainable training program that focuses on intervention epidemiology. It includes a 2-year 'learning-by-doing' course that not only trains individuals, but more broadly supports sustainable training infrastructures. The program supports a regional network of trainers as well as overall capacities in the Mediterranean region. The purpose of the meeting 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).



Through their attendance, EMPHNET's team members participated in the final discussions regarding phase 1 of the MediPIET program. This participation allowed attendees to gain a better understanding of the expectations and goals to be achieved during phase 2.

The desired outcome from the program is to form a competent workforce with the necessary skills needed for practicing intervention epidemiology and the carrying out of essential public health functions for prevention and control of national and cross-border challenges posed by communicable diseases.

## EMPHNET and WHO-EMRO Host NCD Experts' Workshop



EMPHNET in collaboration with the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO-EMRO) hosted an "Experts' Workshop on Advising Countries on Strengthening Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Surveillance and Building Regional Networks". Held in Cairo-Egypt between September 21st and 25th 2014, the workshop's participants included epidemiologists who have worked in the field of NCD surveillance and epidemiological research. The workshop's sessions were positioned to provide the right platform for building regional capacity in the area of NCD surveillance. This was to be accomplished through reviewing the regional situation of NCD surveillance and identifying gaps and challenges to be met. Participants were to agree on a way forward for strengthening NCD surveillance in countries of the region, while building the technical capacity of field experts and also developing a regional experts' network that is willing to advise countries in this regard. Finally, the workshop was also to provide means to review a draft curriculum dedicated to strengthening NCD surveillance. This curriculum is to be adapted and used for future capacity building endeavours.