

EMPHNET NEWS

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

Looking at the milestones we achieved over the past three months, I feel a great sense of pride for all what we have accomplished to date. I also feel a great sense of anticipation for the important events we are yet to achieve in the next quarter, the most important of which is our Fourth Regional Conference which we are hosting in Aqaba-Jordan between September 28th and October 1st, 2015.

Holding the theme *Public Health in the Region: Challenges and Opportunities*, we view this conference as an opportunity to bring the work of many Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents and graduates, as well as other public health professionals into the spotlight. The conference is a valuable payback for their hard work and dedication, and an opportunity for like-minded individuals to meet and share experiences within an educational setting. We are confident that the diverse agenda of the conference will create a platform for constructive dialogue amongst its participants. Our team is making great efforts to ensure that this event presents a memorable experience for all attendees. Our conference website is up and running, and it may be accessed through the following link <http://conferences.emphnet.net/>

Additionally, abstract submission was opened through the conference website's electronic submission system, and we received about 200 submissions from our member countries.

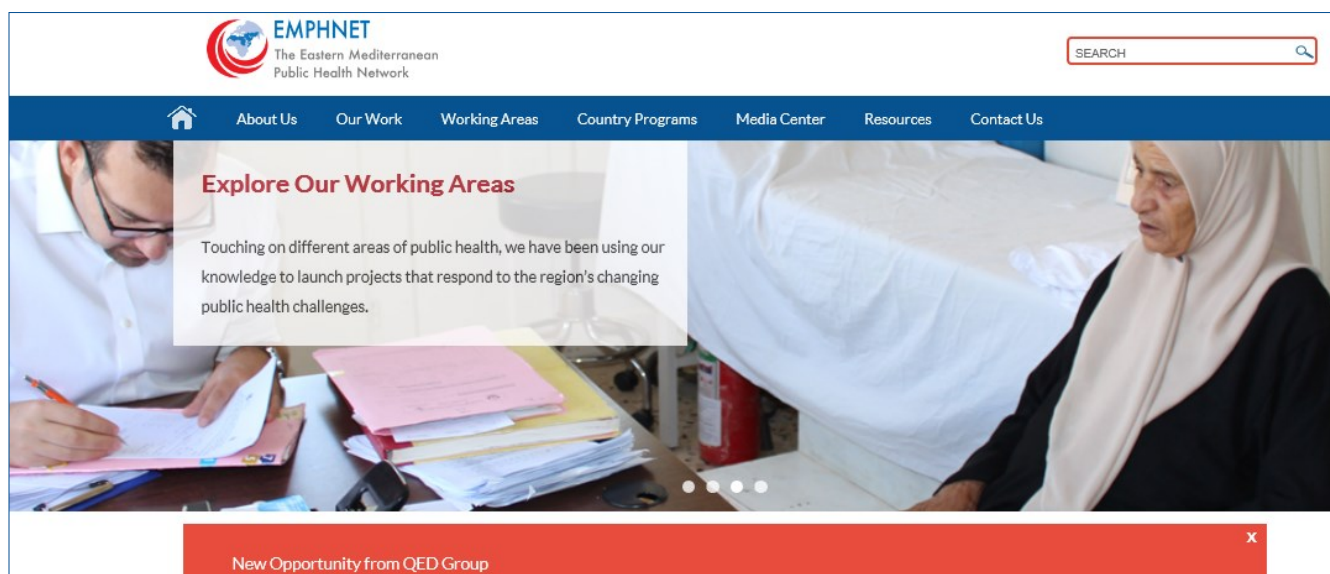
At this point, I would like to acknowledge our member countries for showing great interest and collaboration for this event. The energy and motivation of our FETP residents and graduates continues to play a critical role in the success of this and all other initiatives by EMPHNET. This conference, in particular, thrives 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 this event will be a success and a great achievement to celebrate.

I look forward to seeing you all at our Fourth Regional Conference.

EMPHNET Launches New Website



Stemming from its belief that a website mirrors an organization's scope of work to the world, EMPHNET recently launched its new fully-featured website www.emphnet.net. The new website provides a one-stop platform for country field epidemiology training programs, field specialists, international contractors, donors, partners, policymakers, public health professionals, the media, and EMPHNET's staff to benefit from a wealth of knowledge. The website's "About Us" section provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of EMPHNET's history, mission and strategy, while also introducing its dynamic team and Board of Directors. Similarly, the "Our Work" and "Our Working Areas" sections present information for partners, interested epidemiologists, and field specialists; as it offers a detailed outline of EMPHNET's areas of work, projects, and core competencies.

Responding to the growing demand for simplicity and accessibility, the website also offers Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) residents, aspiring residents, and graduates a dedicated "Country Programs" section in which they can learn more about the FETPs in the region. Similarly, the site's "Media Center" allows potential donors, partners, and other specialists interested in epidemiology to stay updated with EMPHNET's latest news and developments. The website is also an effective information resource for team members and stakeholders alike, as its "Resources" section provides an easy to navigate electronic library of educational materials, publications, and communication tools.

"We developed the website based on the modern user's needs, as people today do not have the time to search too long for information. We wanted the website to reflect the progressive outlook of EMPHNET, allowing for easy sharing and use of information. We also made it compatible with multiple platforms including mobile, tablets, and all internet browsers, explains EMPHNET's ICT Manager Mr. Amjad Hiary, we also linked the website to all our social media channels, as we do recognize that social media visibility is key for any organization seeking to broaden its scope of work."

To further facilitate the easy exchange of information, EMPHNET is currently working on developing a "Members Area". This will serve as a membership based platform dedicated to enable experts and field specialists alongside other members of its target audience to interact. This section will function like an online social network, allowing for messaging, sharing, and posting of information and more. Members will be able to learn about opportunities in which they could expand their scope of work as well as furthering their education. They will also be able to engage in live conversations with peers from around the world within a friendly setting.

"Following EMPHNET's rapid growth and expansion, we felt that the need has come for us to revamp our online presence. To ensure that the website reflects and serves

our strategic goals, we leveraged on the skills and know-how of the region's greatest talents in the field of web design, development, and communication. We were not only concerned with creating a website that reflects the professional image of EMPHNET, but we also wanted to create an interactive online space that is useful to all our users. For us, the website is a valuable developmental step taken towards achieving our mission to improve public health for people in the EMR," explains EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al- Nsour.

The website is still a work in progress, as it will be developed and updated to respond to the growing needs of EMPHNET.

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Spotlight on Yemen

The Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program (Y-FETP) continues to work despite deteriorated security situations caused by war in conflict-ravaged Yemen. More than 3,000 dengue cases have been reported in the country since March 2015. The WHO warned that actual figure could be far higher. Furthermore, Yemen has been witnessing socio-economic and fuel crises caused by halted foreign trade. Power cuts affected health facilities and blackouts have had a serious impact on vaccination services. The power cuts and fuel shortages have affected pumping water through the public grid to homes, thus resulting in an increasing number of water-related outbreaks, especially among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), which are reported to exceed one million according to the Yemen Ministry of Public Health and Population (MPH&P). Within such a situation, Y-FETP residents and graduates participated in four dengue outbreak investigations in Hodeida, Aden, Hadmout, and Shabwa, and two scabies and diarrhea outbreak investigations amongst IDPs.

On the educational side, Y-FETP launched a three-day workshop on "Protocol Writing" in April. The first day of the workshop was devoted to discussions on the development of solid research questions, while the workshop's second day allowed residents to be familiar with creating their own one-page bulleted concept papers. By the end of the third day, residents were familiar with steps of protocol writing. The workshop agenda also featured examples of concept papers and protocols that were developed by past Y-FETP graduates.

Furthermore, Y-FETP conducted a planning workshop which aimed to create an action plan highlighting areas of learning that the 3rd Y-FETP Cohort residents need to focus on within their Y-FETP residency. Y-FETP also held a consultative meeting on how to improve mentorship in June. At this meeting, 20 program directors and mentors presented their personal mentoring experiences. The topics they discussed included mentorship placement and the importance of having a relationship of mutual respect between mentee and mentor. They also spoke about the time investment required by the mentor towards his/her mentee and best practices for guiding mentees and giving feedback.

Y-FETP residents also participated in a National Surveillance Guidelines manual revision and update committee meeting, with public health professionals and policy makers from the MPH&P also in attendance. During this meeting participants decided that revisions on the manual will include a new section reflecting the work of Y-FETP residents in the area of surveillance and that another new section, written by FETP residents, will also be added to the manual. This new added section will focus on NCD surveillance.



Updates from Morocco

Morocco FETP is also expanding its scope of work, as it is expecting its 4th Cohort to start working towards their residency program in September 2015. This is the largest cohort yet to be recruited to date by Morocco FETP. It comprises 20 residents while all past cohorts only comprised 10. Morocco FETP is also collaborating with policy makers in Tunisia to assist the latter in establishing its own FETP. This development is currently in the implementation stage.

Eid Greeting

We hope that you had a blessed Eid, and that you enjoyed peaceful times with your families and loved ones.

Egypt FETP at a Glance

Egypt's Field Epidemiology Training Program (E-FETP) celebrated monumental developments between April and June, 2015. These developments were both in the areas of field work and training.

Developments from the Field

Starting the quarter off actively, E-FETP residents were responsible for checking and reviewing reports on avian influenza cases that occurred in Egypt between the period from October 2014 to April 2015. Accordingly, an Avian Influenza surveillance system was implemented across different governorates in Egypt. The system was supervised by E-FETP residents and teams from the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit of the Egypt Ministry of Health (ESU). E-FETP residents were also involved in the assessment of Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) surveillance systems in sentinel sites. They made these assessments under the supervision of the ESU. From another angle, residents were mentored on how to follow-up and evaluate surveillance systems and hospital capacities. They also participated in developing the "National Strategy for Response to Epidemic and Emerging Diseases". This experience allowed E-FETP residents to acquire the steps needed to develop strategic plans. In addition, E-FETP residents supervised the polio vaccination campaign implemented in Egypt between April 19 and 22, 2015.

In May, E-FETP residents joined forces with the ESU again to be part of the "Epidemic Map" project. Accordingly, they were involved in facilitating the WHO mission for assessing the Avian Influenza situation in Egypt. From another angle, E-FETP residents were also involved in a "Syrian Refugee Survey". This survey was conducted for evaluating the health status of Syrian refugees in Egypt. Also during May, residents placed at the Communicable Disease Control Department of the Egypt MOH, worked on the assessment of food and water borne disease outbreaks. Within their position, they succeeded to update and reconstruct standard operational procedures (SOPs) for responding to food and water borne outbreaks in all governorates.

Also active during the month of June, residents of E-FETP's 17th Cohort organized and developed training materials for a workshop on "Basic Epidemiology for Sanitarians". Recognizing individual achievements, one E-FETP resident was part of the Rapid Response Team (RRT) assigned during the African Conference of Sharm Al Sheikh, held that month. The RRT was responsible for dealing with public health issues of concern in Africa. E-FETP residents also conducted a field investigation regarding a rabies infected dog transported from Cairo to the USA. Their investigation included post exposure prophylaxis of contacts. They also participated in the assessment of Vaccines Cold Chain in some governorates. This investigation was made as a preparatory step for the "National Measles Vaccination Campaign" that will be held in Egypt during the month of September.

Developments in Areas of Training

Also active in areas of education and training, twenty residents from E-FETP's 18th Cohort sat for an introductory course on Epidemiology between April 4 and 9, 2015. During this course they were introduced to the public health field, the FETP curriculum, differences between descriptive and analytic study designs, surveillance and outbreak investigation techniques, and data analysis methods, while in May, residents from the same cohort sat for a surveillance workshop. During this workshop they were introduced to surveillance standards, data collection for surveillance, data analysis, and writing of surveillance reports. Finally, during the month of June, E-FETP residents held two training sessions for 60 Public Health Sanitation workers working at the central and governorate levels. The workshops provided participants with an introduction to epidemiology, biostatistics, surveillance, and outbreak investigations.



To be featured in future newsletter issues please send your country program updates to:

comm@emphnet.net

FETP Achievements in Iraq



In collaboration with International Medical Corps (IMC) Baghdad office, the Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program (I-FETP) conducted a workshop on Emergency Response for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Hosted in Baghdad during April 2015, the workshop was attended by 24 participants from six governorates. The aim of this workshop was to build the capacities of public health specialists working in the field of epidemiology and especially those field specialists directly working with IDPs in Iraq. The participants were primarily working on Emergency Response related to the Iraqi IDP crisis and emergency situations. The workshop covered epidemiologic methods used in complex humanitarian emergencies such as rapid assessment, surveillance, population estimation, and survey design.

The workshop sessions also touched on other public health concerns such as; nutrition, mental health, and mortality, while highlighting the relevance of these issues to the IDP crisis in Iraq. Such workshops fall directly in line with EMPHNET's interests and areas of work. With a mission to improve public health for people in the EMR, EMPHNET views this event as a valuable opportunity for capacity building and for improving the quality of health services provided to this segment of the population.



The workshop provided a balanced agenda, combining both didactic training and hands-on practical training. The workshop also included lively discussions, during which participants learned from each other. It was during these discussions that important questions were raised, leaving attendees with a better understanding of the challenges expected and commonly faced when handling the IDP emergency crises in Iraq. Furthermore, the workshop provided participants with a better understanding of how to efficiently handle issues of public health concern when working on areas of Emergency Response for the Iraqi IDP crises.

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.

News from Pakistan FELTP



Developments in the Area of Outbreak Investigation

Pakistan FELTP residents investigated a food borne outbreak in the country's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) last April. During the investigation, 31 cases were identified. The source of the outbreak was recorded to be contaminated food, and the village head prohibited use of leftover food in the parties and gatherings as per FELTP recommendation. Furthermore, an outbreak investigation of Invasive Candida Infection at a major hospital in Karachi was conducted between April 7 and 14, 2015. Conducting the investigation was the Provincial Disease Surveillance and Response Unit (PDSRU) Sindh and FELTP federal office. The investigation revealed a total of 19 cases of infection reported, yet the source of the infection is still being investigated by the FELTP residents and the hospital infection control team.

Pakistan FELTP Publications and Presentations

4th Cohort FELTP resident Muhammad Asif released a study on the Evaluation of the Tuberculosis Surveillance System in District Hyderabad, Province Sindh-Pakistan, 2012. This study was published in the International Journal of Tropical Disease & Health. ISSN:2278-1005, Volume:9, Issue1: Pg1. Furthermore, 5th Cohort resident Dr. Ijaz Shah presented a poster on, "Outbreak investigation of Dengue Fever in District Mansehra, 2014 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan" in the EIS 64th Conference, held in Atlanta USA, last April.

Pakistan FELTP Trainings and Workshops

The Pakistan FELTP was very active in its aims to build the capacities of its residents. The last three months were filled with training activities and workshops.

Four new NSTOP officers were placed in critical areas of FATA, including a Polio reservoir of North and South Waziristan in May 2015.

The FELTP 6th National Steering Committee (NSC) meeting was held in Karachi in May, 2015. Mr. Muhammad Ayub Shaikh, Secretary, Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSRC) chaired the meeting. Senior leadership from Pakistan Army Medical Corps, Pakistan Planning Commission, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, National Institute of Health and federal and provincial departments of health attended the event. Key decisions made during the proceedings included increasing the FELTP class size to 30 and the admission of 2 cohorts/year if resources are available. The Pakistan Army and FATA also asked for an increase in seat allocation for their public health staff within the FELTP 2-year program.

Also in May, the FELTP conducted a workshop titled "Epidemiology for Senior Decision-Makers". The workshop was attended by senior decision makers from Federal and Provincial Health departments, Army Medical Corp, Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute (AFPGMI), the University of Health Sciences, and Pakistan Medical and Dental Council. The workshop sessions covered issues pertaining to basic epidemiology, surveillance, outbreak response and communications challenges. From another angle, the 8th review meeting of NSTOP was arranged late June 2015. The aim of the meeting was to review performance of each NSTOP officer. CDC Atlanta. The WHO, Emergency Operation Center (EOC), UNICEF, federal and provincial departments of health participated in this review, which was based on the National Emergency Action Plan (NEAP) indicators.

On a different note, this quarter saw a visit from the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta USA. He visited FELTP Pakistan offices on two separate days for detailed meetings with NIH and FELTP staff. On the first days three outbreak investigations were presented to him by fellows. He also met fellows of 6th Cohort during their ongoing classes. On the second day, he met exclusively with 6th Cohort's, 20 selected NSTOP officers and polio eradication challenges and solutions were discussed.

EMPHNET Enhances Public Health Capacities in Zaatari Camp



Over the past few months, EMPHNET has been attending the Jordan Ministry of Health's weekly Health Coordination Meetings held in Zaatari camp. The meetings focused on many issues, including the implementation of the Zaatari Camp School Health Program. This program will target 12 of the camp's grade 1 to 10 schools, benefiting 17,000 students. EMPHNET's involvement will be in areas of immunization and health education.

Within its capacity as a training body, EMPHNET is also assessing the training needs of international organizations working in Zaatari Camp. Based on organizations' feedback, EMPHNET has conducted a scientific lecture about the Rotavirus vaccine and the latest developments pertaining to the Rotavirus vaccine. It conducted this lecture following the Jordan Ministry of Health's decision to introduce the Rotavirus vaccine in its Epi program and to include Syrian refugee camps within the program's scope of implementation. The lecture was attended by 30 participants, all coming from different international organizations working in the camp.

Additionally, EMPHNET held a training session on 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.

In a training session held on April 14 this year, EMPHNET focused on the surveillance of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP). It held this session as part of a larger mission to detect, control, and prevent an outbreak of Polio in the region. Participants included doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, and others working directly with children under the age of 15.

It is worth noting, that EMPHNET continues to work in Zaatari camp alongside other international organization. It serves as a training body in the camp and an active partner concerned with improving qualities of health for Syrian refugees.

EMPHNET Facilitates a MediPIET Session on Humanitarian Crises and Mass Gatherings

During a five-day training titled "Humanitarian Crisis and Mass Gathering", hosted in Amman by the Mediterranean Program for Intervention Epidemiology Training (MediPIET) in June, a team of experts from EMPHNET shared a presentation on the principles of surveillance and response in Mass Gatherings. The presentation highlighted the regional experience of EMPHNET in area of Mass Gathering risk assessment and the implementation of surveillance and epidemic intelligence in Mass Gatherings.

The five-day training session was held in collaboration with the European Commission, the Consortium National Public Health Institute (ISCIII), the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIIAPP) and the Jordan Ministry of Health. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) took scientific leadership of the training content.

The training's sessions were 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. 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 included interactive lectures, videos, exercises, case studies, and field exercises conducted at Zaatari camp in Mafrak Jordan.

Announcement

As part of its aims to enhance the capacities of its team, EMPHNET recently started its professional development program. Empowering team members, the program strives to allow members of the EMPHNET team to train their colleagues. The trainings focus on various soft skills that enhance work, productivity, and levels of professionalism.

EMPHNET Holds Round Table Discussion on Preventing Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases



EMPHNET, with support from the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), held a two-day round table discussion on preventing emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. The event was held in May and hosted in Amman Jordan. It brought 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 discussion aimed to improve biorisk management and 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). Meeting 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 reemerging infectious diseases. They summed up findings and made recommendations for improving biosafety and biosecurity, while dealing with emerging and reemerging infectious diseases.

At the end of the two-day event, EMPHNET launched a mini grant projects competition to improve Biorisk management concerning emerging and reemerging infectious diseases in the participating countries. Mini grant projects will be implemented based on findings of country assessment and recommendations from the two-day round table discussion.

EMPHNET Holds Ebola Virus Disease RST Workshop

EMPHNET, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), held a five-day Ebola Virus Diseases (EVD) Rapid Response Teams (RST) Training. The training commenced on May 24 2015 in Amman Jordan, where 35 participants attended the event including; epidemiologists, laboratory experts, prevention and control specialists, and experts of veterinary epidemiology from Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Libya.

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.

The training included a simulation exercise, with presentations and field work designed by the World Health Organization. Facilitators from EMPHNET, Jordan's Ministry of Health (MOH), Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program



(FETP), Egypt Society of Epidemiology, FETP Morocco, United States Naval Medical Research Unit #3 (NAMRU3), the WHO Regional office of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (WHO-EMRO), WHO headquarters, and Al Bashir Hospital in Jordan participated in the workshop.

EMPHNET Conducts Scientific Writing Workshop to Support Iraq Mass Gathering Project



During May 2015, EMPHNET held a three-day Scientific Writing workshop in Amman, Jordan targeting Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program residents and graduates. The workshop formed an important component within the Iraq Mass Gathering project initiated by EMPHNET last year. It introduced participants to basic structure, formatting and referencing practices used for writing papers published in scientific journals.

The workshop sessions introduced participants to referencing software and online resources designed to ease the scientific writing process. Members of EMPHNET's team

facilitated these sessions, combining theoretical presentations and hands-on training in the agenda.

Throughout the three days, participants applied the information they received to edit the research reports they have written as part of the Mass Gathering Project Mini Grants component. At the end of the workshop, participants were to select a peer review committee, and to continue working on their research projects in order to submit final drafts the following month. Policy makers in Iraq will use these final drafts to create positive healthcare changes during future Mass Gathering events occurring in the country.

EMPHNET Holds Scientific Writing Workshop for Egypt FETP Residents, Graduates, and MOH Officials

EMPHNET held a five-day scientific writing workshop in Cairo-Egypt between June 7 and June 11, 2015. The workshop was held in collaboration with Egypt's Ministry of Health (MOH) and Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Eleven participants, including FETP residents, FETP graduates, and MOH officials, attended the workshop. Designed to strengthen scientific writing skills with special emphasis on developing research proposals and protocols, the workshop used interactive lectures, exercises, and group work where participants developed one-page concept notes and draft proposals for studies on topics of their choice.

Facilitators discussed the goal of scientific writing and presented topics such as the basics of scientific writing; grammar and style elements; displaying data, tables, and graphs; ethics in scientific writing; and components of a proposal and protocol.

At the conclusion of the workshop, working groups presented their protocols on topics that included: 1) Coexisting risk factors of Diabetes; 2) Incidence of influenza associated with Severe Acute Respiratory Infections; 3) Seroprevalence of Hepatitis B and C among children with Thalassemia; and 4) Seroprevalence of antibodies to H5N1 virus.



EMPHNET Participates in a Panel Discussion on “Changing Health Needs in the Middle East and Turkey”

Columbia University’s Global Health Initiative at the Mailman School of Public Health 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 Gives Presentation on Regional Health Priorities

At a workshop organized by the US Embassy’s Environment, Science, and Technology office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, EMPHNET gave a presentation on regional health issues. The workshop was held on April 7, 2015 in Amman Jordan, and was attended by representatives from the U.S. State Department, including officials and officers who work in health and environment issues in the MENA region. It addressed a range of topics in the areas of water security, civil society, biodiversity, science and technology, and health affecting the MENA region.

During this session, EMPHNET provided an overview of its contributions to public health in the region. The presentation included a list of contextual concerns affecting regional health security, while highlighting the impact of war, internal conflict, civil unrest, and natural disaster on national public health status and systems. The presentation also focused on areas of biosecurity and biosafety while further highlighting activities EMPHNET conducted in collaboration with the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP).

EMPHNET Attends “Infant Burden Influenza Meeting and Implementers Workshop”

EMPHNET participated in the “Infant Burden Influenza Meeting and Implementers Workshop” held in Atlanta last April. Organized by Abt Associates Inc. and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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 infants aged one within the target. In addition to Jordan, the study will be implemented in the Philippines, Albania and Nicaragua.

During this meeting, participants discussed details of study methodology and background information on which the study is founded. As part of their participation in the event, EMPHNET’s team gave a presentation about the role of Jordan in the study’s implementation. Other issues

discussed during the meeting included; the study participants, specimen collection, laboratory procedures, and data management amongst other issues.

It is worth noting that the results from this project could influence clinical recommendations for influenza vaccination of pregnant women and infants, as well as clinical testing and treatment guidelines for infants in low- and middle-income countries. Furthermore, the project can significantly impact scientific knowledge regarding the vaccine-preventable burden of influenza among infants in low- and middle-income countries, and it can also create a better understanding of the burden of influenza virus infection in these settings. Through achieving these goals, the study will have a significant role in guiding decision makers working in the field of public health policy, and more specifically it will impact influenza prevention and treatment programs.

EMPHNET Strengthens Brucellosis Surveillance in the EMR

As part of its aims to improve public health for people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, EMPHNET has been working with ministries of health to strengthen brucellosis surveillance at the regional level. In Jordan, it is spearheading a study on brucellosis in collaboration with the Jordan Ministry of Health. The study looks at the rates of Brucellosis spread amongst slaughterhouse workers in Amman, Al Karak, and Al Mafraq. It examines the correlation between the disease spread and the nature of work of individuals selected for the study. The study sample includes veterinarians, butchers, meat sellers, drivers, livestock transporters, administrative workers, and sanitary workers. Information is collected using a special questionnaire and the collection of blood samples.

The purpose of this study is to generate findings that can assist in draft recommendations to prevent brucellosis spread. EMPHNET anticipates that this information will be of use to decision and policy makers working in the field of Public Health in Jordan.

To effectively implement this study, EMPHNET held a one day training session for the study's field team. The training introduced participants to the study tools used for data collection methods for filling questionnaires, collection of blood samples, and data analysis. Its sessions were facilitated by a team of specialists from EMPHNET. The training session was followed by practical application, whereby training participants, including Field Epidemiology Training Program residents, collected data and blood samples from employees in the slaughter houses of Al Karak, Al Mafraq, and Amman. This data collection process was implemented over 10 days.



From another angle, a steering committee consisting of EMPHNET's technical team members and specialists from Iraq's ministries of health and agriculture met in Amman to discuss prospects for strengthening brucellosis surveillance and diagnosis in two provinces in Iraq. On the first day of the meeting participants highlighted the role of the project's steering committee, and EMPHNET presented a work plan based on the status of brucellosis in Iraq as presented by the representatives from Iraq. On the second day of the meeting, participants identified the criteria through which they will be selecting two provinces for implementing the project. According to these 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 used. Finally, they 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 Attends GOARN's 17th Steering Committee Meeting

As a member of Global Outbreak Alert and Response team (GOARN), EMPHNET attended the GOARN steering committee meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland last June. This was the third steering committee meeting EMPHNET attends. The meeting touched on several management issues including; the handover of chairmanship from Tony Sward to Dr. Ray Arthur from CDC. Furthermore, Dr. Ahmaduo from Nigeria was elected as the new vice chair of GOARN.

From another angle, the meeting also included a briefing on the Ebola crises in West Africa. The briefing session showed that ten countries are still affected by Ebola to date, and that the epidemic saw 27,000 cases and 11,000 deaths reported in three continents of the world. To date, two capital cities and five districts in West Africa are infected, though number of cases and deaths reduced significantly compared to last year. Updates on vaccinations and vaccines against Ebola were also highlighted.

During this meeting it was also reported that GOARN deployed 2,320 experts to different outbreak situations in the last 15 years. One third was deployed in West Africa to fight Ebola.

The meeting also featured an update on the MERS-CoV situation in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). The update showed that 26 countries are affected by MERS-CoV to date, and that 1,350 cases are confirmed, 76% of the cases are originated from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Newly affected countries include; Korea, China and Thailand.

Proceedings also included discussions on GOARN's strategic development. Areas that members decided to work on included; the strengthening of GOARN's secretariat, expanding the scope of the network, increasing regional involvement and integration, further development of network capacity, strengthening alert and communication roles of the network, supporting selected field research, defining the role of GOARN.

The meeting concluded with decisions that partners continue to participate in international response activities and that steering committee meetings should be held at least twice a year. GOARN will also be increasing its advocacy efforts, and core curriculums will be developed for field training programs, amongst other strategic and organizational developments.

CDC Brucellosis Team Visits Jordan

A delegation from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Brucellosis team recently visited EMPHNET to discuss areas of possible collaboration between both sides. During their stay in Jordan, the delegation visited the Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH) Central Public Health Lab (CPHL) and the MOH BSL-3 lab which is considered amongst the region's most advanced in the diagnosis of contagious diseases such as; the Ebola virus disease (EVD) and the MERS-CoV virus. The delegation also visited the Veterinary Labs of the Jordan Ministry of Agriculture, where they observed the diagnostic capacities there.

The delegation also toured Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), faculty of Veterinary Medicine, where the faculty demonstrated diagnostic methods adopted in its veterinary labs, and it visited the PHBC Prince Haya Biotechnology Center in Jordan to discuss possibilities of conducting a training on the molecular diagnosis of Brucellosis for specialists in Iraq.



From another angle, the CDC team also assessed the developments made on a Brucellosis study currently being implemented by both EMPHNET and Jordan MOH. The study looks at the prevalence of Brucellosis spread amongst slaughterhouse workers in Amman, Karak, and Mafrak. It examines the correlation between the disease spread and the nature of work of individuals selected for the study. The study sample includes veterinarians, butchers, meat sellers, drivers, livestock transporters, administrative workers, and sanitary workers. Information is collected using a special questionnaire and the collection of blood samples. The purpose of this study is to generate findings that can assist in draft recommendations to prevent brucellosis spread. EMPHNET anticipates that this information will be of use to decision and policy makers working in the field of Public Health in Jordan.

It is worth noting that this is one of many projects implemented by EMPHNET, as such initiatives bring EMPHNET closer to realizing its vision for achieving better health for the people of the EMR.