

# EMPHNET NEWS

## Newsletter Issue 14

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## EMPHNET's Word

By: Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, Executive Director

Dear Members, Partners, FETP Residents, and Graduates,  
It is my pleasure to communicate with you through this issue of our quarterly newsletter.

The last three months have been lined with milestones that have enabled us to make our mark on the Eastern Mediterranean public health arena. Personally, I was proud to be present in two groundbreaking events supported by EMPHNET namely; the National Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program Conference and the Graduation Ceremony featuring the second class of Iraq FETP.

With pride I also take this occasion to affirm that our country programs are making their marks of success on both local and regional levels. Believing in the endless room for improvement, we have been learning from observations we made from past experiences to build our operational capacities so that they are now better suited to meet regional public health demands.

Operating within this digital era, where fast communication is key, we have also worked to open new and valuable channels of communication between ourselves, our partners, and our target audiences. In-line with this resolve, we updated our communication strategy, whereby we had strengthened our presence on social media networks. I am confident that this is the year in which both we and our strategic partners will see breakthroughs in Jordan FETP and other country programs. I can see us building up our core capabilities, aiming to secure “Better health for people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”.

In closing, I want to thank our team across the region for their hard work and commitment. I also want to thank our partners and our subject-matter experts for their support and contributions. I thank you all.

Regards,  
Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour

## Y\_FETP Hosts First National Yemen FETP Conference

Under the Patronage of His Excellency Yemen's Minister of Health and Population, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Qasem AL-Ansi, the Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program (Y\_FETP) conducted its "First National Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Conference" in Sanaa alongside the first Y\_FETP cohort graduation. Held between February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> 2014, the event's sessions were attended by 150 individuals including; the Yemen FETP residents, graduates, and public health professionals from various public health entities.



Amongst the notable figures in attendance was EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, who was also joined by the Resident Advisor of Iraq FETP, Directors of Jordan and Egypt FETPs, Yemen's health officials, the Deputy Minister of Health, and other field specialists. The conference's active agenda provided an unmatched opportunity for the first FETP cohort graduates to share their experiences in field epidemiology, whereby they gave their presentations before colleagues, public health officials, and university professors.

On the whole, the conference served to enrich the Y\_FETP visibility both nationally and regionally, echoing the distinctive scientific capacity of the graduates featured.

## The Second Cohort of Iraqi FETP Commemorate the End of their Educational Journey

Representatives from Iraq's Ministry of Health, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and the US CDC together celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of Iraq FETP. The ceremony was held under the patronage Iraq's Minister of Health His Excellency Dr. Majid Hamad Amin who was represented by his Deputy for Technical Affairs at the ceremony.

Event highlights included inspirational talks. These talks were given by; Deputy for Technical Affairs Dr. Sattar Al Saeidi, EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, the Deputy Minister of Health, the Director General of Public Health, Dean of Baghdad's College of Medicine, the Executive Director of Iraq FETP, the Iraq FETP Residents Advisor, and a speaker speaking on behalf of the

More specifically, the Executive Director of the Iraq FETP delivered a presentation on the activities performed under the program's umbrella, while from his end, the Iraq FETP Resident Advisor gave a presentation on the main activities carried out by the FETP residents over the last two years. The Residents were given awards from the Minister of Health, and the ceremony concluded with the graduation and recognition of nine FETP residents.



It is worth noting that Iraqi FETP residents receive at the end of their second year of FETP training a higher diploma from the Baghdad College of Medicine. This diploma grants them eligibility to work in the Ministry of Health where they will be responsible for running FETP units in the provinces. Within their line of work, they will be responding to outbreaks and other health occurrences. Their duties will also entail compiling surveillance data for Communicable Diseases, NCDs, and injuries, while also training other FETP residents.

**In this section, we share success stories related to our line of work. We highlight our team's notable achievements, and our partners' success milestones. So share with us your success story, and enjoy your moment of fame and recognition.**

### Success Story from Iraq

Meet Dr. Abdulaal Abdulhussain Chetheer Al-khumis who lives and works in Missan, Amarah Iraq. He is a Field Epidemiologist who graduated from the Iraq-FETP 2012 cohort. He holds an M.B.CH.B, a Degree from the University of Al-Basrah, and a Higher Diploma in Applied Epidemiology from the University of Baghdad. He is currently working as the Director of Field Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit, and is also the Director of the Acute Respiratory and Enteric Diseases Unit in Missan DOH, the Head of the Rapid Response Team in Missan, and a member of the Rapid Response Team in Iraq. He is also a representative at the Regional Response Team in the Middle East assigned by EMPHNET, an Executive Manager of NCD interventional trial in Missan, a member of the National External Monitoring and Evaluation Team for Injury Surveillance System, and a member of the National Tech-

As part of his graduation requirements from the FETP system, he took part in a long-term assignment in one PH unit. The assignment took on the form of a mentoring program which was to be attended by all graduates after completing the didactic course. The mentorship scheme has been founded on the belief that such a practice offers an effective method for skill and competency development. The mentor-mentee interaction echoes the resolve that skills are optimized through the exchange of experience between a more skilled person and a person seeking skills. This is what Dr. Abdulaal Abdulhussain Chetheer Al-khumis gathered when he was himself a mentee.

### Rapid Response Team Marks Another Success

Recently one of EMPHNET's Rapid Response Team (RST) members was selected to take part in an international response activity following the typhoon Yolanda in Philippine. Ms. Majd Saleh, an Epidemiologist by profession, was trained in 2012 in Amman Jordan to be a Rapid Response Team member. She is currently working in the Epidemiologic Surveillance Program, Directorate of Prevention, and the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon. Following her selection, she will be part of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network with a role to strengthen the Public Health Surveillance System in Zamboanga, Philippine and to support Post Emergency Disease Surveillance.



His long-term assignment was to work at the Iraqi Injury Surveillance System (IISS); a hospital-based sentinel surveillance operation established in 2009 with US CDC and WHO as its main technical partners. At the time, he was interested in entering the field of injury and violence epidemiology and prevention.

His mentor, Dr. AbdulSalam S. Sultan, the Executive Manager of IISS, was indeed a very skilled person. He was the Director of the Ministry of Health's Continuous Medical Education (CME) Section within the Human Resources Training and Development Center (HRTDC). Read more about how they worked together to succeed on EMPHNET website, this is a true example of partnership and triumph .





## Mass Gathering Supplement of Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal (EMHJ) is Now Out

The Mass Gathering Supplement of Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal (EMHJ) is now out featuring two training workshops conducted by EMPHNET. The journal is published in collaboration with the Center of Diseases Control and Prevention, and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists.

They covered topics are related to “Public Health Surveillance during Mass Gathering” with the objective of increasing their participants understanding of surveillance required at mass gatherings events. The workshops also served to meet the challenges presented by mass gathering events, in addition to having the government authorities and event organizers prepared well in advance by carrying out risk assessment, comprehensive planning, and adequate system enhancements, as well as undertaking surveillance of events to assess their public health impact.

### Jordan FETP Gets Involved in the Syrian Crises

Local authorities in Jordan have always exerted significant efforts to provide shelter and related infrastructural needs for the growing number of Syrian refugees in the Kingdom, and in this regard the Jordan Field Epidemiology Training Program (J-FETP) even collaborated with Jordan’s Ministry of Health (MOH) to support the latter’s disease prevention and health protection programs targeting this demographic.

Such tasks are often very challenging, costly, and complicated to achieve, however this particular endeavor has been a success. In this regard, J-FETP sought support from EMPHNET to establish an electronic information system, set to be adopted within the MOH’s health facilities. This system serves as a tool to obtain information about the health of the Syrian Refugees in relevance to socio demographic variables, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up. The information fed into system is obtained from health directorates and hospitals in Jordan, and it is used to assist the MOH in gathering data about the Syrian Refugees seeking health-care services in Jordan. Now, the MOH can identify the burden of diseases among this segment by adding this information to its weekly statistical reports.

Other J-FETP activities included checkup and control on food quality and water sources including chlorine testing; health-care promotion and education. J-FETP also worked to detect diseases which are considered under control in Jordan including; Tuberculosis, Bilharzias and Leishmaniasis, and Cholera, and it followed up with concerned authorities regarding sewage disposal inside the camp.



J-FETP also contributed to efforts made for maintaining the health status of the Syrian Refugees inside the Camps in Jordan. It achieved this goal by establishing a surveillance system for communicable and non-communicable diseases, and by supervising and monitoring health centers and health providers. Furthermore, it conducted vaccination campaigns for polio and measles, while also raising awareness about vitamin A. Furthermore, it provided the required vaccines for this segment in accordance with the national immunization program, and it conducted outbreak investigations for communicable diseases including diarrheal diseases.

## EMPHNET Joins Forces with International and Local NGOs to Assess the Syrian Crises

In-line with the key role it plays in the fields of research, capacity building, and assessment studies, EMPHNET got involved with different local and international agencies to provide studies relevant to the latter's lines of work. It worked in keeping with the demands and challenges faced by Syrian communities living in Jordan, thus conducting three main assessments activates.

EMPHNET conducted a **Health Assessment for the Displaced Syrian Refugees in the Jordan Valley (JV)**. The assessment was planned with an emphasis on health as an indicator to guide the future response of concerned entities. The overall objective was to determine the main health needs of displaced populations in the JV area with the aim of enhancing the humanitarian response. Assessment was done as a collaborative effort bringing together the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH), International Medical Corps (IMC), Jordan Health Aid Society (JHAS), Aman Association, and EMPHNET. The results of the study revealed that there were no problems related to infrastructure and availability of the essential equipment and supplies in the assessed facilities. Based on the conducted assessment, a series of recommendations were made related to shelter and non-food items, water, sanitation, and hygiene, living conditions, food security, and infant and child feeding, health recommendations, and education.



Furthermore, EMPHNET also conducted a **Mental Health assessment for the Syrian Refugees in Jordan**. This assessment has been serving as a comprehensive rapid assessment conducted to provide the WHO, IMC and MOH in Jordan with information necessary for planning and delivering Mental Health Related and Psychological Social Support (MHPSS) services to displaced Syrians in Jordan. Assessment conducted by EMPHNET was funded by the WHO and IMC, with technical support and contributions from the WHO, IMC, MOH, and the MHPSS Working Group.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the assessment served to assess the nature of MHPSS services provided to the targeted segment; and to identify the gaps in MHPSS services necessary for delivering comprehensive treatment, interventions, and rehabilitation of displaced Syrians in Jordan. Assessments indicated that mental health symptoms and problems were slightly more common among Syrian refugees living in Zaatari camp compared to those living outside the camp.



From another angle, the Ministry of Health and other Polio Eradication Initiative Partners requested from EMPHNET to work as an independent party to conduct a **Post-Polio Campaign Evaluation**. The campaign was set to evaluate quality of the fourth round of Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), and the effectiveness of National Immunization Days campaign conducted by the partners.

Overall, the camps had an acceptable coverage of OPV (97.6%), also the OPV coverage at the district level was more than 95%, which is in-line with the globally accepted guidelines and recommendations of the 59<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, convened 2006.



## EMPHNET Develops a Computer Software to Monitor Developments of Non-communicable Disease (NCD) Prevention Project



To date, the involved health service providers have been highly motivated to use the tracking system, seeing it as a useful guide for evaluating achievements of the project's purpose and goal. Now, health centers started providing their monthly reports by using this system as well.

In-line with the sustainability of its NCD prevention project implemented in Ajloun, EMPHNET developed a computer software that is designed to monitor NCD patients. The software is to work as a tracking system for involved health centers.

To date, the system has helped as an operational mechanism for building information systems that monitor project progress, obtain results for decision-making, and determine project outcomes.

Moreover, EMPHNET held a basic computer skills training course and on-job training workshop for the health service providers in health centers involved. These endeavors taught the latter how to effectively use the tracking system.

## FETP Residents Participate in an “Outbreak Response Training” by the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)

EMPHNET worked within a team of facilitators forming the Outbreak Response Training program by the Global Outbreak and Alert Response Network (GOARN). As part of its involvement in the program it held a lecture titled “Steps of Outbreak Investigation”.

The training was conducted in Jordan, between March 25th and 31st, 2014, to be the first of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. A committee consisting of WHO Headquarters, WHO, EMRO, and EMPHNET, selected participants from the FETP countries based on a certain set of criteria. Twenty out of twenty-four participants were participating from EMR countries and eleven out of twenty participants were participating from FETP countries namely Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.

Other participants joined the training from Australia, Senegal, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Sudan and Bahrain, while facilitators from top universities, hospitals, and institutions from different countries held the workshops. All speakers at the event were from the Departments of Health within Western Australia, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Queensland Australia, EMPHNET, NSW Health, Sydney Australia, ICDDR Bangladesh, National University Health System, Singapore, WHO Headquarter and WHO EMR.



It is worth noting that, GOARN was established at the global level in the year 2000, with aims to provide technical collaboration within existing institutions and networks that pool human and technical resources for the rapid identification, confirmation, and response to outbreaks of international importance. Today, the Network provides an operational framework to link expertise and skills, and to keep the international community constantly alert to the threat of outbreaks. EMPHNET obtained membership of GOARN in May 2012, whereby it also served as member of the GOARN steering committee since December 2013.

EMPHNET is happy to announce that the Fourth Regional Conference will be conducted in Iraq-Irbil in cooperation with Ministry of Health, Iraq. This decision was made based on the recommendation of the Board of Directors' meeting during the Third EMPHNET Regional Conference in Morocco.

## EMPHNET Revamps its Website

The new version of the website includes new services and features such as an Experts Data Base designed to gather experts from the region and elsewhere to work with EMPHNET and other partners. It will also offers a Private Social Media Networking Platform, designed to initiate the connection and collaboration between EMPHNET and the FETPs residents, graduates, public health professionals, and other entities. The website will also contain a library which will include EMPHNET educational and communication materials.

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