

EMPHNET NEWS

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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 remember the first issue of our newsletter and how eager we were to officially announce the establishment of EMPHNET. When I look back, I feel pleased with how far we have come with regard to our goals. We pledged to work on supporting the FETPs, to build strong an epidemiologic workforce, and to contribute to the enhancement of public health conditions 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 enhance the capacity of field epidemiologists.

This newsletter edition presents a wide range of topics. It gives full coverage of two regional trainings that were successfully completed to enhance rapid response and public health ethics. Although we consider both topics important in strengthening public health in the region, the public health ethics training disclosed high interest among participating countries. It presented ethical considerations in relation to a range of public health intervention, such as: surveillance, outbreak investigation, screening, health promotion, and vaccination.

From another angle, our country programs have been effectively and positively enhancing public health standards and practices regionally. More specifically, we have made strides in our mission to spread health awareness to the general public, and the results are especially apparent in the achievements made

through our Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) project in Ajloun. Our regional endeavors have enhanced our visibility and presence in internationally acclaimed health arenas like the 63rd Annual Epidemic Intelligence Services Conference, as this conference brought some of our country programs' achievements to the spotlight, and particularly the developments our programs saw in Egypt and Pakistan. Fortunately, we are also able to feature the Yemen FETP in this newsletter, and we are eager to bring into focus all FETPs in the issues that follow.

As always, my hope for EMPHNET is that we can continue to provide support to countries in the region and that we invest in partnerships that can promote the growth of our FETPs. We consider the FETPs assets to the region, and we remain committed to working with partners towards strengthening the capacity of these programs. We believe that the FETPs are indispensable to our region's public health arena, and that each program presents a milestone of continued success. Together, we will enforce change in the region because we believe in the power of knowledge and we consider information as a superficial element unless it is enriched with experience. EMPHNET has come a long way since its establishment in October - 2009, and is certain to achieve much more with your help, support, and determination.

We achieve what we imagine, and we become what we dream.

Yemen FETP Beats the Test of Time

“As an advisor, I learned early on to be deeply involved in the work of residents. I learned to push them, encourage them, and to provide them with the guidance, support, and understanding they need to succeed, but most importantly, I learned to be there and to help them overcome challenges,” said Technical Advisor of the Yemen Field Epidemiology Training Program (Y-FETP) Dr. Abdel Wahed Al Serouri when we asked him what the traits of a good mentor are.

The Y-FETP is one of the newer programs operating within the EMR, only launched three years ago. However, Dr. Abdel Wahed had only joined the team in 2013. His involvement with the Y-FETP residents came into effect after attending the Advanced Epidemiology training for the first Y-FETP Cohort that year. At the time, the post of Technical Advisor was not assigned to anyone, but it was sensed that the residents needed his support. Drawing on his innate sense of helpfulness, he diligently offered them guidance, but it was not until April 2013 that he was officially assigned as the Y-FETP Technical Advisor, following his attendance of The 1st Arab World Conference on Public Health held in Dubai that month.

From day one, he realized that a lot of work needed to be done. “I joined the team in May 2013,” he said, “only to realize that the residents had not fully completed any of their graduation requirements, which were due in February 2014.”

Taking on a proactive approach, Dr. Abdel Wahed Al Serouri, decided that a plan needed to be put in place. “Our residents did not even start their planned study project, so we set off to give them a crash two-day course in protocol writing in September 2013. Of course, that left us with only 3 months to finish everything else.” He added. On that same month, Dr. Mohammad Qayad joined the Y-FETP, taking on the post of Resident Advisor.

Bringing with him his past experiences from his work at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and a passion to work in the field of International Health, he was eager to see this endeavor succeed. “Before taking on this post, I had worked for two years in Saudi Arabia at the National Guard Health Authority within the Department of Family Safety. I then did a training session for the Y-FETP second cohort in May 2013, before joining the Y-FETP in September that year. I then officially took on my responsibilities as Resident Advisor two months from my joining date, and following an induction course I had to sit through.”

Beating the Clock

“First things first, we felt we needed to set a clear deadline for our 12 graduates, so we set that date to be February 26th 2014, coinciding with our First National Yemen Field Epidemiology Program Conference. Our graduates were not only set to celebrate their graduation during that event, but they were also to present their work as well. To add to the challenge, we were also expecting our second cohort residents in January 2014, and we were to assign them to programs following their advanced training which they sat through in December 2013. Seven of our First cohort graduates were also to give presentations at EMPHNET’s third regional conference to be held in Morocco in December



2013,” Dr. Mohammad Qayad added, “so indeed we had a lot of work to do. I would say we were up for the challenge. If you ask me how we succeeded, I would reply that it was our and our residents’ persistence, sacrifice, and strong will that made us meet these tight deadlines. It is not enough to have committed technical and resident advisors on board, as a great portion of this success goes to our residents’ hard work, and their willingness to take guidance and to be pushed to their highest potential.”

“They had to deliver three reports, and a presentation at the end of the program, but they worked hard and we worked hard, all putting in 7-day weeks. Looking back, I can say that the feeling of achievement one gets at the end of this all is worth the effort. It is really fulfilling,” he further stated.

Shared Understandings

“Our role went beyond academic and technical guidance,” Dr. Abdel Wahed Al Serouri said, “After all, we had many of our residents leaving their families in the rural areas and governorates to join the Y-FETP. This meant we had to sometimes take on the role of ‘father and son’ and we had to give them the moral support they need. We were their family away from home, and we had to maintain that role at all times. In some cases, we had to work with poor language competencies, which meant that we had to keep all channels of communication open. We had to provide a friendly environment in which our residents can accept our edits, and our recommendations on their reports.” Dr. Mohammad Qayad further added that the Y-FETP was even lacking in terms of logistical requirements at the time. “While working with the first cohort, we didn’t even have an office. We were working from the office of the Director General of the Disease Control and Surveillance at the MOPHP. It wasn’t until May 2014, that we got a space of our own.”

That Was Then!

Indeed, the Y-FETP had come a long way from those modest beginnings. It is set to accept the third cohort residents in November 2014, while moving smoothly with the requirements of the second Cohort. According to Dr. Mohammad Qayad, the second cohort are given a strict schedule where they are to complete one deliverable every three months.

Future plans for the Y-FETP also include an outbreak investigation to be conducted in Addis Ababa, as well as an advanced Epidemiology course to be conducted in September 2014.



“We have proudly celebrated many achievements on the ground,” said Dr. Abdel Wahed, “Through our program we have carried out six outbreak investigations in 2014 alone including, an investigation involving fava-beans distributed by a charitable NGO. These fava-beans caused oxidative stress and hemolytic anemia among glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficient individuals. Although this can be fatal under some circumstances, it is quite easy to control when we know the cause. Our job was to calm people down and show that this was merely a hereditary enzyme deficiency. We gave them the recommendation to avoid fava beans. In fact with such evidence our residents persuaded the charitable NGOs to replace fava beans with another food at its next delivery. Our residents also investigated mumps outbreaks in schools, providing the government with evidence for the need to introduce mumps vaccine in the routine expanded program on Immunization in Yemen, not to mention investigating the first case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus in Yemen.”

“We still have a lot to achieve,” he added, “As we now need to ensure that our Ministry of Health and Population (MOPHP) hires our Y-FETP graduates in leading posts. We also need to raise awareness about the role our graduates can play in the public health field. We have to find ways to make our program sustainable, and to find new mentors and supervisors to pave the way for further success. Of course, we have to find ways to incentivize those wishing to take on this role, and we have to make true efforts to raise the English Language capacities amongst our residents. At times we are constrained by security conditions in the country and other issues such as political unrest, and we are still looking for ways to overcome such hurdles. However, we are on the right track, and any program like the Y-FETP is a learning process.”

Speaking of learning, Dr. Abdel Wahed stated that the Y-FETP will benefit from the English language course that will be funded through EMPHNET, yet it is still finding ways to fit this course within the residents’ busy schedules. “Furthermore, we started a resident profile program designed to raise the competitive spirit amongst residents, where it displays the achievements of each. “It is funny how people are naturally competitive, our residents are now competing to be recognized.” he added



It’s All About Teamwork

On a broader scale, Deputy Director of the Y-FETP Dr. Ali Bin Break claims that the Y-FETP is deeply involved in coordination. It links graduates, the MOPHP, and the program advisors. “We are moving forward in the right direction, and we are always looking to get technical advisors on board. We work closely with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to look for ways to overcome external factors affecting the smoothness of our operations.” Similarly, Dr. Basil Obaid, the first graduate from the Y-FETP attests to the fact that the program has gone a long way. “I was enrolled before the program was even introduced to Yemen, and I even started my education in Jordan. I was fortunate to see the best of both worlds, and was able to work on the Dengue and Chikungunya outbreak in Yemen. I was fortunate to present the findings of my work on mass gatherings for the 20th GCC football Aden tournament, held in Yemen, 2010. I presented these findings during the 2nd EMPHNET Regional Conference held in December 2011 in Sharm Al Sheikh, Egypt.” ■

Iraq FETP Residents Learn Do’s and Don’ts of Scientific Research



With aims to arm Iraq FETP residents with the scientific writing skills needed for effective research and knowledge sharing, EMPHNET in cooperation with U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) held a Research Protocol workshop in Amman, Jordan. Held between April 6th and April 10th 2014, the workshop offered its participants a survey of the most commonly used scientific research methodologies. Its sessions offered a hands-on experience for those in attendance, boasting an agenda that combined presentations, discussions, and practical exercises where participants were familiarized with the elements of effective research. At the end of the workshop, attendees finalized their own concept papers and later transformed them into research protocols, ready for future implementation. This event was held as part of ongoing efforts made to introduce FETP residents to the benefits of constructive research. Its proceedings served to foster high levels of enthusiasm and commitment, while keeping trainees deeply engaged throughout the 4 days.

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EMPHNET Zooms in on Polio Eradication

EMPHNET organized a one-day Polio Training Workshop, thus joining forces with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) MENA regional office, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the better good of Polio eradication. Held in Amman, Jordan on April 10th 2014, the workshop was attended by the third cohort of Iraq FETP residents and WHO, UNICEF and CDC staff members. Its sessions offered attendees a wealth of information, granted within a productive space that was inviting to the broader sharing of ideas. More specifically, attendees learned more about the principles and feasibility of disease eradication; strategies for outbreak response; while also gaining a global overview on Polio. The event's presentations and discussions touched on Acute Flaccid Paralysis, active surveillance; micro planning, monitoring; routine immunization; and strategic communication. The end result was that all involved parties left the event more informed, while gaining further valuable insight into the current polio operations in Iraq.

EMPHNET Hosts First Regional Public Health Ethics Training



EMPHNET hosted, for the first time in Jordan, a regional workshop on Public Health Ethics. Taking place in Amman, between June 15th and 19th 2014, the event covered a broad range of topics pertaining to ethical public health practices. Throughout its duration, the workshop's full-day sessions touched on the philosophical understanding of public health ethics, moving on to ethics in surveillance, health promotion, vaccination, emergencies and disasters, alongside public health research, and ethical codes and frameworks. The event was set to answer pressing questions like whether or not it is ethical for a mother to refuse immunization for her child and what does or does not constitute an ethical practice amongst public health specialists. In his opening remarks, EMPHNET's Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour stated that the workshop was designed to address ethical considerations and questions for various important public health issues, such as immunization, surveillance and outbreak investigation. The event sessions combined practical examples, presentations, and discussions of case studies.

EMPHNET Boasts Active Presence at the 63rd Annual Epidemic Intelligence Services Conference



EMPHNET, represented by its Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, was actively present at the 63rd edition of the Annual Epidemic Intelligence Services (EIS) Conference hosted in Atlanta Georgia between April 28th and May 1st, 2014. Organized and held by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the event highlighted the life-saving work of the CDC's current EIS officers or "disease detectives", while also welcoming the incoming class of EIS officers to be. Over the years, the conference has been providing an active platform for similar international programs such as the Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) held in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). In this regard, delegates from Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, and Morocco FETP's were present at the event's proceedings, and as part of the event's International Night agenda the achievements of the Field Epidemiology Laboratory Training Program in Pakistan were highlighted, alongside the findings of an Outbreak Investigation of Hepatitis E in Skardu City in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) Province Pakistan. The evening also featured a session on Patient Profile of Diabetes Mellitus (DM) in Egypt, focusing further on the results of a population-based survey conducted in Egypt, in the year 2012. From another angle, the conference hosted a special session on the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), while also shedding light on the status of Syrian refugees in the region. Meetings were also held between EMPHNET and CDC delegates, with aims to explore lucrative opportunities for further collaboration between both sides.

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EMPHNET Hosts Sub-Regional Rapid Response Teams Training Workshop

EMPHNET hosted the Sub-Regional Rapid Response Teams Training Workshop in Amman Jordan, between June 22nd and 26th 2014, kicking off proceedings in the presence of Director for Communicable Diseases Department from the Jordan Ministry of Health Dr. Mohammad Abdallat, alongside FETP Coordinator and Member of EMPHNET Board of Directors Dr. Amgad Al Kholy and EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour. The workshop was attended by 27 participants from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen. It covered a wide range of topics pertaining to rapid response. All sessions were positioned to introduce participants to the nature of public health emergencies, offering a particular focus on the Syrian refugee crisis. The workshop's participants were familiarized with the principles of risk management and the steps to be taken during outbreak investigation. The event agenda also covered a full range of topics pertaining to concepts of Risk, Reduction, Readiness, Response, and Recovery (The Four R's), the steps of outbreak investigation, the essential indicators of emergencies, the rapid assessment of complex emergencies, infection control and prevention, control of communicable diseases, and surveillance in humanitarian emergencies, NCDs in emergencies, alongside several other issues of relevance.



In Search for Answers, EMPHNET Introduces NCD Health Facility Survey

EMPHNET, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH), is now in the process of conducting a "Non Communicable Disease Health Facility Survey". The aim of this survey is to assess the existing governmental health services offered in comprehensive health centers and hospitals in response to the increased demand on NCD and mental health services in Jordan. Such increased demand is attributed to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. Therefore, the survey is set to identify the health needs of both Syrian refugees and their host community, while also evaluating the health-care facilities' competency in providing these services.

To achieve a comprehensive outlook, the survey is being conducted in five governorates in Jordan namely; Zarqa, Irbid, Mafraq, Jerash, and Ajloun. It takes into account the services offered in 42 comprehensive health facilities and 12 hospitals within these areas.

To achieve a comprehensive outlook, it covers several assessment focus areas namely; facility infrastructure, NCD health services, diagnostic and laboratory services, drug and medicine supplies, mental health services, health information systems, and the facilities' capacity to meet patient needs and demands. The investigation tool used for this survey includes a questionnaire created in collaboration with the WHO and the MOH and a team of medical and technical cadres. Findings will be published by mid-August this year, so stay tuned.

CDC Delegation Visits Ministry of Health, Jordan



In an exemplary expression of collaboration and partnership, EMPHNET participated in an exchange with a delegation from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), which is an operating component of the U.S. government that visited Jordan Ministry of Health (MOH) with aims to improve global capacity to deal with public health threats. The visit was hosted by the Jordanian MOH, allowing for critical public health topics to be discussed within a collaborative environment. The focus of this exchange was to achieve the goal of global health security, a goal that is shared among CDC, the MOH and EMPHNET. Visiting CDC delegates included; Director of the Division of Global Health Protection Dr. Jordan Tappero, Principal Deputy Director of the Division of Global Health Protection Dr. Khashel Ijaz, and Chief of the Emergency Response and Recovery Branch/ Acting Chief of the Global Disease Detection Branch Michael Gerber.

As a partner to both Jordan MOH and CDC, EMPHNET participated in meetings hosted at the MOH, the Central Public Health Laboratory, and the Emergency Operations Center. On the second day of the visit, EMPHNET and its Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour hosted the CDC delegation and the U.S. Environmental Science, Technology and Health (ESTH) officers. The delegation's visit was regarded as a successful exchange. The meetings facilitated important discussions about relevant issues pertaining to public health. These discussions resulted in productive outcomes for future progress. From another angle, the collaborations that took place during the visit demonstrate reliable partnerships that exist among the MOH, CDC and EMPHNET. These partnerships, combined with a shared commitment to protecting public health, will allow for significant advancement in regional

EMPHNET NCD Project Focus

The Non Communicable Disease (NCD) project is a collaborative effort between EMPHNET and the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Jordan. The project aims at promoting healthy behavior in response to the burden of NCDs. In the last three months the project has been making notable strides and we bring you the highlights.

EMPHNET Launches NCD Prevention Project in Orjan

Under the patronage of Governor of Ajloun H.E. Abdullah Aal Khattab and Director of Ajloun Health Directorate, Dr. Abdul Rahman Tbeshat, EMPHNET launched the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) prevention project in the Ajloun-based Orjan health center. The launch event was attended by local community leaders, members of the Community Health Committee, and health service providers.



Women of Sakhra Take the Proactive Approach to Better Health

For the first time ever in Ajloun's history, the women of the Sakhra Women's Association took on a proactive approach to promoting better health practices for fellow community members, thus holding their first Health Awareness Day. The event, attended by 40 people, was aimed at increasing participants' knowledge about the early detection, and prevention of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and NCD management. Its agenda included lectures about NCDs, their causes, and a rundown of lifestyle activities that could prevent their occurrence. The event's sessions were conducted by health specialists from the Ministry of Health (MOH) Dr. Ala' Hdaib and Dr. Marouf Awais who shed light on the importance of physical activity as a means to prevent the occurrence of NCDs. Following the lectures, attendees were given the chance to check their blood pressure, and to understand the implications of their blood pressure readings on their well-being.

Al Awasirah Association Hosts Healthy Kitchen and Health Walk Event

EMPHNET's NCD Project marks another success, as it sees the people of Al Awasirah Association collaborate with the Orjan Health Center and the Orjan Culture Club to hold a healthy kitchen and health walk event. As the title indicates, the event was aimed at highlighting the importance of physical activity and healthy diet as means to prevent the occurrence of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and obesity.

Bringing together over 40 interested individuals from the local community of Ajloun, the day saw its attendees come together in unmatched unity. Speaking at the event, Orjan Health Center Representative Dr. Majdi Haddad highlighted the role of physical activity as a means to prevent obesity and NCD occurrences. Then, taking on a "learning by doing" approach he and all the other participants took part in a 3km walk, and finally, they enjoyed a meal prepared by the Healthy Kitchen team.

EMPHNET Highlights Desired Dietary Eating Practices for NCDs

Under the Patronage of the Director of Ajloun Health Directorate, Dr. Abdul Rahman Tbeshat; thirty-two health-care providers participated in a nutrition workshop titled "Dietary Eating Patterns for NCDs" in May 2014 in Amman. Attendees were introduced to the latest trends adopted within the nutritional field. More specifically, they were familiarized with the MyPlate Guideline, which is the current nutrition guide published by the United States Department of Agriculture, alongside a full host of other pressing topics.

EMPHNET & Ajloun Comprehensive Health Center Hold Healthy Kitchen and Health Walk



EMPHNET in collaboration with the Ajloun Comprehensive Health Center organized a health day featuring a healthy kitchen and health walk. The one-day event brought together members of Ajloun's local community in one space in which they shared the one goal of becoming healthier and more proactive individuals. Speaking at the event, Dr. Ghada Akari gave a lecture about the importance of physical activity as a means to prevent obesity and the occurrence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). She encouraged 40 attendees present to adopt simple life practices that will enable them to live healthier lives. Putting words into action, the event agenda also included a 3km walk. The participants taking part in this activity included patients of diabetes, hypertension, and other NCDs, who together made the statement that anyone can live a healthier life. The attendees then witnessed a practical implementation of the dietary direction they were given in the event's lectures, as they enjoyed a healthy meal prepared by the Healthy Kitchen team.

Health is Made Easy to Understand by EMPHNET



Believing that powerful communication is the agent of long-term change, EMPHNET recently developed and released a full health communication package, soon to be disseminated across all health centers operating in Ajloun. This package is set to serve as an information source for members of Ajloun's local community, offering citizens and healthcare providers an easy to understand reference on Non Communicable Diseases NCDs. The package includes a dietary manual, three pamphlets on diet and obesity, diet and diabetes, and diet and hypertension, a Body Mass Index BMI wheel, and two posters. One poster offers a visual representation of diet and energy intake and outtake, while the second familiarizes healthcare providers and patients with the MyPlate Guideline, which is the current nutrition guide published by the United States Department of Agriculture. The package has been approved by the Ministry of Health and is now ready for distribution.

Dr. Fathima Ameena Nalim Shares Her Experience in Jordan

Dr. Fathima Ameena Nalim from Emory University in Atlanta, travelled to Jordan in June 2014 to work with EMPHNET on a feasibility study titled, "Using Mobile Technology and Social Media to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Jordan." The study aims to evaluate the potential for using new information and communication technologies (ICT) such as smartphones, social media, and others, for data collection and development of cost effective public health awareness programs.

Throughout her stay, she conducted in-depth interviews with key informants and youth aged 18-35. Furthermore, focus group discussions were carried out to evaluate the feasibility of m-tech and social media to increase awareness of modifiable risk factors that influence NCD prevalence in Jordan. Results of this research will serve to inform pilot studies to raise awareness of obesity risk factors among youth in Jordan.

Commenting on this experience, Dr. Fathima Ameena Nalim said, "Becoming a part of the EMPHNET family was a great honor for me, as it offered a unique opportunity to work alongside those who are in the forefront of public health practice in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Thanks to a great team and experienced public health practitioners at EMPHNET, my data collection was very successful and covered a diverse group of people from many governorates. I wish to thank everyone at EMPHNET for the warm welcome and for making my stay a productive and very positive experience."



Dr. Fathima Ameena Nalim further added that she enjoyed meeting leaders and others at the Ministry of Health and at Ajloun Health Directorate, alongside other key figures in Amman, Ajloun, Balqa, Dibe'en, Irbid, Jerash, Arjan and Rajeb, as they all took the time to speak with her.

"I felt proud to be present at the first health walk in Arjan and also at the health walk organized by the Ajloun Comprehensive Health Center. It was encouraging to see the women, men and youth demonstrating support for non-communicable disease prevention and control in their communities. I thank the women and community members in Arjan and Ajloun health walks and Rajeb Wellness Day for the warm welcome extended to me. I came away with wonderful memories of their hospitality and a resolve to support their commitment to improving the lives of people faced with the challenges of overweight and obesity. It was also a privilege to get to know the dedicated youth workers who volunteer to improve the health of youth in Jordan. I return to the USA with a promise that I will make every effort to contribute towards improving the health and wellbeing of the people of Jordan," she stated.

Dr. Nalim is currently working for Dr. Scott McNabb, Professor at Rollins School of Public Health.

Stay tuned for our next issue, where we share with you more news and updates from EMPHNET