

# EMPHNET NEWS

## Newsletter Issue 18

January — March 2015

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## EMPHNET's Word

By: Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, Executive Director

In looking at the milestones we celebrated over the past three months, I feel proud of the promising start this year has shown. I would like to acknowledge our member countries for the high level of cooperation and collaboration demonstrated by the Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs). The energy and motivation of the FETPs continue to play a critical role in the success of EMPHNET's initiatives. The start of this year demonstrated a high level of regional collaboration in the area of training activities. The Polio Outbreak Investigation and Response Workshop, conducted in February, was a collaborative effort among WHO, CDC, UNICEF, and EMPHNET. The workshop was considered a first step towards establishing a roster of experts to respond to Polio outbreaks in the region. In January, EMPHNET conducted a regional workshop on Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origins, engaging field epidemiologists from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Jordan ministries of health. Additionally, officials from ministries of health from six countries in the region engaged in a third regional initiative, Rapid Response Teams Training, at the end of March to build skills for public health surveillance, outbreak detection, and evidence-based decision making during emergencies.

At the EMPHNET office, we focused on enhancing our operational capacity by introducing new information and communication technology (ICT) tools. We launched a new document management system to enhance internal collaboration across teams, streamline processes, and strengthen the security of our documentation. I am proud of our ICT Team and their commitment to ensuring that our staff have access to the systems and tools that promote our capacity and quality of work. We have also applied new ICT tools to enhance our trainings and activities by introducing electronic pre and post-assessments to workshops, thus facilitating analysis of training impact.

In the upcoming quarter, we will continue to foster regional

collaboration, and look forward to multinational trainings that address relevant public health concerns, including Ebola outbreak preparedness and emerging and re-emerging infections. We will continue to work with countries to identify and respond to national concerns, while encouraging experience exchange among member countries when applicable.

The achievements of the first quarter of 2015 have provided momentum for what I anticipate will be a successful and progress filled year for EMPHNET and our member countries. With the collaboration of countries in the region and support from our partners and Board of Directors, I am confident that we will celebrate many more achievements this year.

*We strengthen our capacity by strengthening our communication tools.*

## EMPHNET Adopts Office 365 as its Documentation and Communication System of Choice

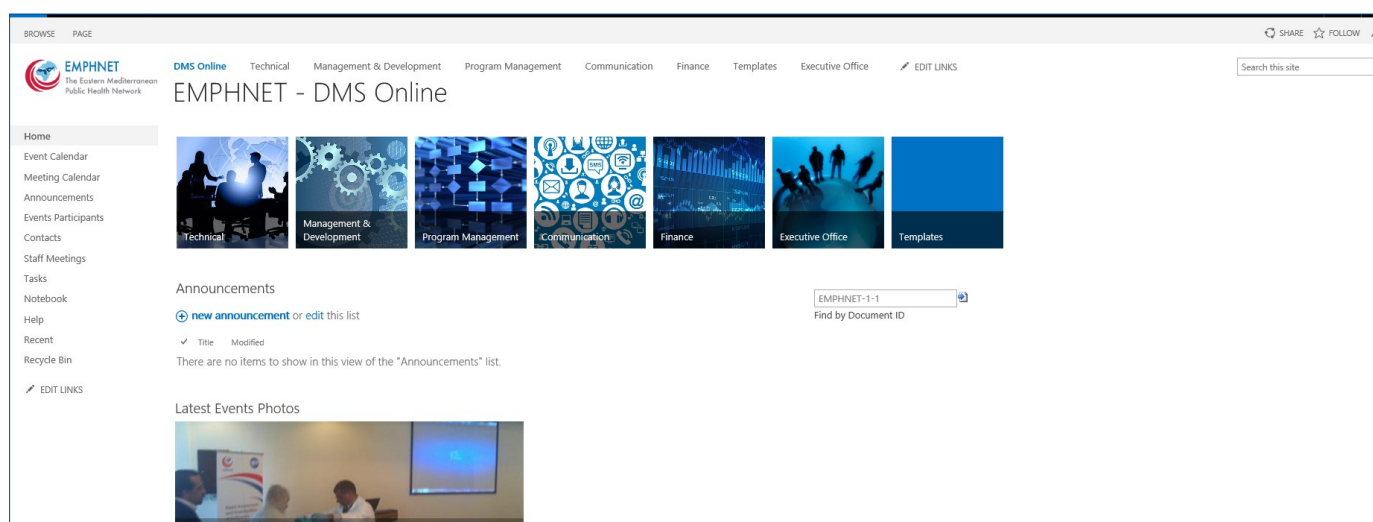
EMPHNET announced that its team will use Microsoft's Office 365 cloud services as its main Document Management System (DMS). This development comes as part of the network's efforts to enhance communication and smooth collaboration across all team members. This new arrangement will help reduce costs, but what's more important is that Microsoft Office 365 DMS comes with features that will improve collaboration between employees. The new system will provide enterprise social network, messaging and information sharing tools, and will also enable team members to access their files from anywhere and at any time. Furthermore, it will allow team members to collaboratively work on documents simultaneously through its innovative real-time edits.

"We made the decision to switch our mode of operation to Office 365 so that we are better able to meet high efficiency standards within an expanding team," explains EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, "We are a more agile organization with Office 365 DMS."

Now, setting up new projects and managing communication across different departments is easier, as all relevant information is available to all team members in one place, thus dispensing the need for back and forth emails to be sent across departments. The new system will also offer EMPHNET's team the tools they need to facilitate more effective collaborations with country programs. It will allow EMPHNET to more effectively support these programs, and to archive all relevant documents in one place. From his end EMPHNET's ICT Manager, Mr. Amjad Hiary stated that with Office 365, the organization can reduce IT costs by retiring third-party solutions and dispensing with the need for maintenance and management of aging servers.

"Now this cost can be allocated to providing EMPHNET's team with productive and user-friendly document management tools. Another great benefit of Office 365 is the reduced cost of physical and bulky infrastructure, as all documents are now saved on a cloud based solution," he added.

"We view this as a strategic development in the history of EMPHNET, as now our team can manage their work across different geographical locations while collaborating with third parties with ease. This development definitely falls in line with our mission to provide better public health services across the Eastern Mediterranean Region as it makes knowledge sharing easier. On the internal level, our team is better able to engage in more efficient levels of operations, thanks to the many feature that Office 365 provides," Dr. Al-Nsour added.



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## Iraq FETP Updates

Under the patronage of her Excellency the Minister of Health Dr. Adeela Hammoud Hussein, the Public Health Directorate in cooperation with EMPHNET held a graduation ceremony for the third Iraq Field Epidemiology Training Program (I-FETP) cohort on March 4th, 2015.

Furthermore, between March 22nd and March 25th, 2015, EMPHNET collaborated with the Public Health Directorate and the FETP in Iraq to hold the Iraq Mass Gathering Research Projects Meeting in Baghdad, Iraq. During this meeting, FETP residents and graduates discussed results and recommendations of their research projects with EM-

PHNET and FETP technical specialists. Topics included: injury patterns at selected medical outlets during the Arbaeenia mass gathering, assessment of medical equipment and medications offered to mass gathering attendees via mobile clinics, community participation in the provision of health services during mass gatherings in Karbala, disease burden on health facilities during the Arbaeenia mass gathering, and the frequency and determinants of non-communicable diseases during the Arbaeenia mass gatherings as observed in Karbala, Najaf and Babel hospitals during 2014. On the third day of the event, recommendations from these research projects were presented to the

Director General of Public Health, Director General of Operations and Special Medical Services, Director General of the Najaf Health Directorate, and the Director General of Karbala Health Directorate. These recommendations were later submitted to her Excellency the Minister of Health for approval to distribute findings to concerned parties. Disseminating the findings of these research projects will help to strengthen the public health services during future religious mass gatherings in Iraq.



## Yemen in the Spotlight



In Yemen, the Y-FETP second cohort residents started their six months English course supported through EMPHNET to improve their writing and conversation skills. Furthermore, six Y-FETP graduates, residents and staff participated in the "Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origin workshop" held in Amman, January 17-21, 2015. The Y-FETP also conducted the advance epidemiology training for its second cohort February 1-5, 2015 that was facilitated by Y-FETP Technical Advisor and Iraqi FETP Resident Advisor. The second cohort

residents were trained on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in the same month. The Y-FETP finalized and submitted 16 abstracts for the 8th TEPHINET Global Conference, and four residents submitted photos for field for 2015 EIS FETP International Night Photo Contest. Furthermore, Y-FETP residents and graduates participated in two measles and one scabies outbreak investigations in Sa'dah, Al Jawaf and Hajjah.

The second Cohort Y-FET residents started their fourth rotation (March-

June, 2015) and were granted placement in the following central Yemen Ministry of Health and Population programs: Electronic Disease Early Warning System, Laboratory Based Surveillance, Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response System, National Central Public Health Laboratory, National Oncology Center, Central Veterinary Laboratory, National Schistosomiasis Control Program, National Center for Blood Transfusion and research, National HIV Control Program, Expanded Program for Immunization, and National Camps Program.

The Y-FETP planning workshop was held to set program plans for the third upcoming Y-FETP cohort, on March 25, 2015. The acting Minister of Health, Policy Unit Director, Y-FETP graduates, University and Board staff, and consultants together with Y-FETP Director and staff attended the workshop.



## Spotlight on Pakistan

The Pakistan Field Epidemiology Laboratory Training Program (P-FELTP) kicked off the new year, by conducting a three-day Motion Stop Transmission of Polio (NSTOP) review meeting in Islamabad January 5-7, 2015. A total of 35 NSTOP officers and provincial leaders presented an account of the activities in the field they had carried out over the past six months. The concluding ceremony for this event was chaired by the Prime Minister's Focal Person on Polio Eradication, Ms. Ayesha Raza who addressed issues and challenges encountered in the field and identify next steps to move forward in Polio eradication efforts.

Furthermore, the first contact session for seventh cohort of P-FELTP commenced on January 12, 2015. The session is planned to run till April 3, 2015. A total of 19 fellows including two from Sindh, four from FATA, two from KP, four from Balochistan, one from Central Health Establishment, one from Pakistan Medical and Research Council, two from Pakistan Army and three veterinarians took part in this development. The second contact session for 6th cohort was also held during the first quarter of 2015, from February 2 to February 20. A total of 18 fellows attended the planned sessions and also took part in the field exercise.

On January 30, 2015, Sindh's Director General of Health Services, visited the FELTP office. During this visit, discussions were made regarding placement of FELTP fellows at the Provincial Disease Surveillance and Response Unit. Various short trainings for the Department of Health Sindh staff were also discussed.

Three fellows from FELTP Pakistan attended the training workshop on Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origin held in Jordan January 17-21, 2015. The training was jointly organized by EMPHNET and USAID to focus on public health response. It focused on deliberate use of biological or chemical agents that affect health, deliberate and natural infections/outbreaks, and the role of veterinarian in outbreak investigation of food borne diseases and infection prevention and control.

Furthermore, two abstracts (one oral and one poster) from FELTP Pakistan have been accepted for presentation at the Sixth Annual Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH). The conference held in Boston, which was held in March 2015. One abstract (poster presentation) has also been selected from FELTP Pakistan for presentation at the 64th Annual EIS Conference (International Night), making this the fifth consecutive year for an abstract to be selected at the International Night from FELTP Pakistan.

The month of February was equally as active, whereby a survey on the vaccination coverage of Tehsil Murree, District Rawalpindi was conducted February 9-12. More than 670 children under 2 years of age were evaluated. 19

fellows of 7th Cohort, 18 from 6th Cohort and four faculty members took part in the field exercise. On February 17 Maj General Asif M. Sukhera, Deputy Surgeon General Pakistan Army, delivered a lecture on Leadership in Public Health to the 7th Cohort fellows of FELTP Pakistan, while on February 19 Maj General Viqar A Khan, Commandant Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute, delivered a lecture on Role of Institutions in Public Health to the 7th Cohort fellows of FELTP Pakistan.

A meeting was also held in the office of FELTP Pakistan on February 26, 2015, to discuss the disease surveillance in Pakistan. Coordinator of Disease Early Warning System (DEWS), at WHO Dr. Moosa Rahim and Provincial Leader at DEWS, Dr. Jaleel Kamran, and Resident Adviser for FELTP Pakistan attended the meeting. Avenues of collaboration to improve disease response in Pakistan were discussed.

An outbreak of Leishmaniasis in Tehsil Salarzai, Bajour Agency, FATA, was carried out by four fellows of 7th cohort from March 5 to 10, 2015. A total of 112 cases were enrolled in the study and an equal number of age and sex matched controls were taken for comparison. On March 9, 2015, Derek Ehrhardt, Epidemiologist CDC, visited the FELTP Pakistan office. Discussions on expansion and strengthening of the N-STOP program in Pakistan were carried out with the National Coordinator N-STOP, Deputy National Coordinator NSTOP and the Resident Advisor.

Also in March, a three-day training on Communicable Disease Surveillance



and Outbreak Response was conducted at Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute. A total of 36 senior medical officers from Pakistan Army and 19 fellows of the 7th cohort of FELTP attended the training. Commandant AFPGMI, Maj Gen Viqar A. Khan distributed completion certificates to the attendees. Furthermore, on March 24, 2015, the Resident Advisor delivered a talk on disease surveillance at the Emerging Threats in Infectious Diseases: Arboviruses and Antimicrobial Resistance Symposium held at Aga Khan University, Karachi. Dr. Jamali, Manager Malaria Control Program, Sindh, presided over the meeting. A discussion regarding the challenges faced with prevention and control of arbovirus infection was carried out. Issues pertaining to antimicrobial resistance were also discussed.



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## Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origin Workshop

EMPHNET held a five-day workshop on the “Rapid Assessment and Investigation of Outbreaks of Suspicious Origin” in Amman, Jordan January 17-21, 2015. The workshop was designed to arm field epidemiologists from the Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Jordan ministries of health with the skills needed to investigate outbreaks of suspicious origins. The workshop was conducted to enable participants to rapidly detect, assess, and respond to outbreaks induced by contaminated food and water sources. The event inauguration was attended by Managing Director to the Middle East Scientific Institute for Security (MESIS) His Highness Al Sharif Nasser Bin Nasser, Executive Director to EMPHNET Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, and health professionals from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Jordan. Speaking at the event inauguration, Dr. Al-Nsour said that this workshop is one of many public health endeavors adopted by EMPHNET to improve public health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and to build capacities of public health field specialists and epidemiologists is worth noting that this training is the first in a series of activities undertaken by EMPHNET to enhance bio-risk preparedness and response in the EMR.



## Tarik Rhandour Gives Inside Look at Ebola Epidemic

Tarik Rhandour is a Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) graduate from Tunisia who had completed his residency last year. As part of his program requirements, he spent a few weeks during 2014 in Conakry, the capital city and largest in Guinea, where he gained experience with the Ebola epidemic response. Following his return from Guinea, he sat with us to tell us his story.

His visit was arranged in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Centers of Disease Control and Prevention CDC and the Training Program in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET).

Dr. Rhandour explains that despite challenges, it was an amazing opportunity for him. At the time, he was still an FETP resident so, this experience allowed him to interact directly with experts in the field.

“Most of the doctors working with us had experience with malaria, HIV, and other diseases. They also had experience working in Africa while I was the only one who was taking part in such an investigation for the first time. I also got to learn just how difficult the nature of this particular epidemic could be. I learned that there were many stakeholders that we needed to involve in order to control its spread. We used to work with WHO office, MSF, UNICEF, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, the ministry of health, the communities, the ministry of

religious affairs, and the ministry of interior. Together these entities formed over 10 stakeholders. Another side we had to deal with was the media. The team leader used to participate in the weekly mass conference.

Working in the field also made me understand more why this epidemic is especially difficult to keep under control. I saw the evidence first-hand and it is much more accurate than hearing about it.



## 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 great contributions in the issues to come.

## EMPHNET Holds Polio Outbreak Investigation and Response Workshop



In an effort to capitalize on Polio reduction efforts in the region, EMPHNET conducted a “Polio Outbreak Investigation and Response” workshop in Amman, Jordan, February 7-12, 2015. The workshop was conducted in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The event brought together 38 participants from Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and Iraq. Its opening session was attended by the Manager of the Polio Eradication Emergency and Support Department at the WHO Regional Office of the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), Mr. Christopher Maher, Team Leader of Workforce Development Team Strategic Information and Workforce Development Branch, Global Immunization Division, Dr. Hardeep Sandhu, Coordinator Strategy Support Coordination Unit Polio Department at Genève World Health Organization Office Dr. Arshad Qudus, Chief of health, Nutrition and WASH at the UNICEF, Middle East and North Africa Regional Office Dr. SM Moazzem Hossain and Executive Director to EMPHNET Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour.

Facilitated by a team of experts from EMPHNET, UNICEF, CDC, WHO, and the National Polio Certification Committee in Jordan, the workshop’s sessions covered a wide range of topics including; basic strategies to Polio eradication, the progress seen in the global Polio Eradication Initiative from 2001 until the present date, the regional status on Polio eradication, Polio vaccines, and other pressing topics.

This workshop presented the first step in a series of activities designed to build a roster of Polio experts from the pool of human resources available at the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). Experts listed on the roster are to investigate and respond to Polio outbreaks, while implementing the “end-game” plan and “WHO/UNICEF strategic plan for Polio outbreak response in the Middle East.” More specifically, the workshop provided an overview of the Stop Transmission of Polio Program (STOP) activities. Its sessions provided participants with the knowledge they need to respond to Polio outbreaks, review technical sheets for Polio eradication, to monitor Polio immunization activities, and to engage in evidence-based decision making.



## Launching Joint Mission on Respiratory Surveillance



EMPHNET and the Jordan Ministry of Health was part in a joint mission by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (WHO-EMRO), and the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit-3 (NAMRU-3), set to form a national strategy geared towards strengthening respiratory disease surveillance in Jordan. EMPHNET Executive Director, Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour and Technical Advisor, Dr. Adel Belbaisi, joined the mission which engaged all partners in meetings and field visits to sentinel surveillance sites. The visits took place March 9-12, 2015, with a focus on surveillance for acute respiratory infection (SARI) and influenza like illnesses (ILI). The collaboration aimed to support the Jordan MOH in enhancing its national preparedness level against threats posted by influenza, MERS-CoV, and other respiratory pathogens.

Respiratory pathogens have the potential to cause pandemics, with the ability to easily spread across countries and regions. Outbreaks of respiratory diseases pose a significant threat to global health security. By strengthening health system ability to conduct enhanced surveillance, countries will increase national capacity to detect and rapidly respond to respiratory disease outbreaks, such as influenza.



## Dr. Mohamed Elghazaly Shares His Experience Fighting Ebola in Liberia



Dr. Mohamed Elghazaly MD, MPH is currently a Field Epidemiology Training Program resident in Egypt. He is working as a zoonotic disease focal point at the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP-EGYPT). He is also one of Egypt's rapid response team members working at the central level, and is sharing his experience working on the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

"Our Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) Coordinator Dr. Sahar received a request from the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) stating that World Health Organization (WHO) requested the help of interested FETPs to participate in Ebola outbreak response efforts currently undertaken in West Africa," said, Dr.

Elghazaly. "I did not think twice about this opportunity, and applied for this task as soon as I received the email. It took me about a month to finalize travel arrangements and paperwork, after, I got the MOH approval. With the support of the MOH, I was on my way to Liberia through Geneva. Initially I was going for 4 weeks but the WHO country office requested that I extend my stay. I ended up staying for two and a half months."

The work did come with its own set of challenges, as the situation in Liberia was the worst among the countries affected by Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in west Africa. In the second epidemic wave, the number of cases in Liberia was alarming. A rapid intervention was crucial in order to respond to the EVD outbreak in a prompt manner," explained Dr. Elghazaly.

"This gave rise to much needed support. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) in Liberia was requesting rapid response and proper interventions. The MOHSW had the potential to overtake and respond to the outbreak, however support was needed in different parts of the country. On the bright side, this gave a chance for capacity building and the training of staff on Epi/surveillance activities," he added.

Dr. Elghazaly explained that restoration of health services was a major challenge for healthcare workers in other health facilities (other than Ebola treatment centers) as there was lack of triage and IPC material for them to work with. According to Dr. Elghazaly, the experience was very challenging, as it offered opportunities for capacity building, and it also served to assist the local community in lowering social stigmas associated with Ebola while raising community awareness to the disease and its prevention. Dr. Elghazaly said that the opportunity helped him develop a greater understanding of the underlying resistance of communities.

## Iraq FETP Celebrates Third Cohort Graduation

Under the Patronage of Iraq's Minister of Health, Dr. Adela Hmoud of the Iraq Public Health Unit, the graduation of the third Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) cohort commenced March 4, 2015. Supported by EMPHNET, the ceremony was held at the Babylon Warwick Hotel in Baghdad, with the presence of Ministry of Health representatives Dr. Abdul Sattar al-Saedy, and Dr. Ziad Tareq - Director of Public Health; and EMPHNET's Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour.



In an address to attendees, FETP Director Dr. Qahtan Alsalihi affirmed that the ceremony commemorated the graduation of 30 students, all of whom have successfully completed the requirements of the two-year program on applied epidemiology. Dr. Faris Lami, Iraq FETP Resident Advisor, gave a presentation during the ceremony congratulating graduates on their hard work and commitment to the program. The graduates now hold higher diplomas accredited by both the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and the University of

Baghdad, as well as a training certificate recognized by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They will move on to join previous graduates in their efforts to strengthen public health capacity and workforce at central and governorate levels throughout the country.

*We would like to congratulate the Third Cohort of Iraq FETP graduates, and we wish them further success in their careers.*

## EMPHNET Holds Mass Gathering Policy Brief Meeting

EMPHNET, in collaboration with, the Iraq Ministry of Health, and the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP), held a Mass Gathering Policy Brief meeting in Baghdad March 22-25, 2015. Attended by Iraq Ministry of Health officials, the four-day meeting focused on developing and presenting evidence-based recommendations for improving public health practices during mass gatherings. This meeting marked the third phase of a year-long initiative focusing on “Mass Gathering in Iraq”. So far, the “Mass Gathering in Iraq” initiative included a five-day introductory workshop on public health in mass gatherings, hosted in Najaf City, Iraq last October. FETP residents, graduates, and public health officers implementing disease detection and control programs in Iraq attended the October workshop. Attendees then had the opportunity to apply knowledge they gained during the workshop for the implementation of eight field study projects in December, with the support of mentors from the Iraq MOH and EMPHNET.

This meeting focused on converting the results of the mini grant field studies into evidence for decision-making. The first two days of the meeting featured the preparation and revision of eight group presentations with guidance from mentors, including EMPHNET Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour, Deputy Director Dr. Adel Belbaisi, and Research and Health Informatics Team Leader Dr. Ali Arbaji, as well as Iraq FETP Director Dr. Qahtan Alsalihi and Residence Advisor Dr. Faris Lami. The presentations addressed research topics that included: readiness of healthcare facilities during the mass gathering, satisfaction of attendees with healthcare services, event burden on health facilities, common risk factors, and syndromic surveillance of communicable diseases.



## NCD Steering Committee Meets to Discuss Sustainability of Ajloun NCD Project



ters; promoting physical activity by installing physical activity equipment at the health centers and/or adjacent community based organization; improving registry and follow up of NCD patients by installing computers and relevant patient information system; producing and supplying NCD health education material together with training guides on physical activity and nutritional counseling; and conducting a series of wellness days, healthy walks and healthy kitchen sessions.

The committee agreed that the project's achievements need to be capitalized in an effort to maximize sustainability efforts. There was a consensus over the importance of presenting Ajloun NCD project as a successful initiative both nationally and regionally. EMPHNET has been slowly phasing out of the project and making arrangements with Ajloun Health Directorate, the NCD Directorate and the Information and Research Directorate to secure measures to sustain the project. EMPHNET acknowledged the role of the FETP in implementing the project.

On February 25, 2015, EMPHNET hosted a steering committee meeting with members from Jordan's Ministry of Health (MOH) and Jordan Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP). The meeting aimed at presenting the milestones realized by the non-communicable disease (NCD) project initiated in Ajloun three years ago.

The meeting presented achievements

undertaken to strengthen NCD prevention and control measures in Ajloun. These included capacity building at seven health centers in the areas of physical activity and nutritional counseling, implemented in parallel with health promotion activities targeted to increase community awareness to NCD risk factors and their prevention. Project outcomes were presented with a specific focus on furnishing a special NCD counseling room at each of the seven health cen-



## EMPHNET Holds Rapid Response Teams Training in Collaboration with BEP and CDC



EMPHNET held a five-day Rapid Response Teams (RST) training in Amman Jordan, March 28 — April 1, 2015. The training was held in collaboration with both the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Biosafety Engagement Program (BEP). Its sessions brought together specialists from the ministries of health of Pakistan, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. The overall goal of this training was to build the capacity of public health specialists working in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), whereby participants were being trained in areas of public health surveillance, outbreak detection, outbreak investigation, rapid response, disease control and evidence-based decision making. On a larger scale, the Rapid Response Teams training aims to improve capacities of relevant staff working

within the region's ministries of health, thus enabling them to work effectively as public health epidemiologists in emergency situations.

“EMPHNET trained more than 75 individuals on Rapid Response so far,” explained EMPHNET’s Executive Director Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour. This training comes as part of EMPHNET’s RST Initiative established in 2012. EMPHNET’s Rapid Response Teams Training is a collaborative project, which is initiated to fill the human resource gap and enable the member states to build collaboration with relevant regional and international organization for providing quality health care services to the affected population of the region during manmade, natural disasters and outbreaks.

## Monica Matsumoto Shares Her Experience as an Intern at EMPHNET

EMPHNET was excited to welcome its intern, Monica Matsumoto, in November 2014. Monica is currently in Amman on a nine-month U.S. Fulbright student research grant. She graduated from Rice University in May 2014 and will be attending University of Chicago’s medical school starting in August 2015. She expressed deep interest in public health research and activities in Jordan and applied for a part-time internship with EMPHNET before arriving in Amman. In the past six months at EMPHNET, Monica has been contributing to a variety of different areas, but she has mainly focused on developing content for the new website. She is working with EMPHNET’s technical teams to document and write articles about the organization’s extensive training activities and research projects in the region. She has helped to review and edit documents and reports, and has enjoyed mentorship opportunities with several of EMPHNET’s team members. Monica has been able to learn several new skills, such as graphics design techniques and concepts, as well as an introduction to methods for statistical programming. She said, “I have learned so much about on-the-ground public health work and NGO operations through this internship, which are invaluable skills for my career aspirations in medicine, public health research, and hopefully policymaking, as well.”

Outside of her work at EMPHNET, Monica is working on her Fulbright project investigating public opinion and awareness about umbilical cord blood banking through surveys of women at hospital clinics in Jordan. She is conducting this project with the mentorship of Dr. Rana Dajani (Hashemite University) and Dr. Kirstin Matthews (Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy), and is working with several physicians and researchers in Jordan to analyze and use the results for policy and educational purposes. She recently

published an article in the journal, *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation*, titled, “Cord Blood Banking in the Arab World: Current Status and Future Developments”, and hopes to submit her current work for publication after presenting it at the International Society for Stem Cell Research conference in Stockholm in June 2015. In her free time, Monica enjoys studying Arabic, being active, especially playing football and hiking, and playing cello in the Jordanian National Orchestra.

