

Summary report on the

Third meeting of the WHO collaborating centres in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

WHO-EM/RPC/035/E

Cairo, Egypt
29–30 April 2015



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

WHO collaborating centres are institutions designated by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) to form part of an international collaborative network carrying out activities in support of the Organization's programme of work at all levels. They represent a highly valued mechanism of cooperation in which selected institutions are recognized by WHO in order to support it in implementing its mandated work.

Designation of a qualified institution as a collaborating centre recognizes a history of collaboration with WHO and provides a formal framework for future joint activities. It is a time-limited contract of collaboration during which the institution agrees to implement concrete activities designed to support WHO's programme of work.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized a meeting of the WHO collaborating centres operating in the Eastern Mediterranean Region on 29–30 April 2015 in Cairo, Egypt. It was attended by directors of WHO collaborating centres working in the Region and by responsible officers from different technical units and departments in the Regional Office. The objectives of the meeting were to review the general rules and policies regulating designation or re-designation of collaborating centres and streamlining their work with WHO's programme of work; discuss the challenges faced by collaborating centres in implementation of planned activities in collaboration with WHO; and orient the centres with regard to WHO strategic priorities in the Region. Professor Fareed Minhass (Pakistan) served as Chairperson. Professor Arwa Oweis (Jordan) was the Rapporteur.

The meeting was opened by Dr Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, who noted that the last time WHO had met with its collaborating centres in the Region was in 2003. He emphasized that successful collaboration between WHO and a collaborating centre required particular attention to joint preparation of the centre's terms of reference and work plans, which was an activity that involved the institution itself and WHO at regional and global levels.

The agenda included presentations by WHO staff as well as selected directors of collaborating centres, followed by discussions. The presentations covered: regional health challenges, priorities and strategic areas of work; eligibility criteria for selection of collaborating centres, use of the WHO's name and logo, funding and conflict of interest, intellectual property rights; the process of designation and (re)designation; and challenges, opportunities and sustainability with a focus on priorities for future work as well as coordination and implementation of joint activities with WHO.

Group work sessions on the second day focused on ensuring that work plans and related activities were aligned with the strategic priorities, improving collaboration among collaborating centres in common areas of work and addressing challenges and issues encountered during implementation of work plans and activities.

2. Summary of discussions

Currently there are 44 designated WHO collaborating centres in the Region (out of a total of 798 globally). With the exception of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has 15 active centres, most Member States have between one and four centres.

Participants discussed the results of a recent survey given to directors/responsible officers of the regional collaborating centres. They highlighted challenges in the following areas.

(Re)designation process. There is a long processing time; providing feedback on the designation process and any related changes of processes; sharing messages with related stakeholders; impact on management policy and activities; tangible support for the WHO-CC: training, financial / technical support; only activities in the line of WHO, are being reported;

Communication. Participants emphasized the need for: efficient, regular and timely communication with responsible officers (especially for preparation of the action plan including terms of reference and related activities); regular meetings between collaborating centres and WHO regional and global counterparts; and better use of current communication technology.

Contribution to WHO's programme of work. The director of a collaborating centre in Egypt reflected on the mission, reference laboratory capacities, training modules, outbreak support, capacity-building activities and biomedical training facilities which are used to support WHO's programme of work in countries. The participants highlighted underutilization of the existing expertise of collaborating centres and noted that collaborating centres are not much involved in joint operational planning at country level.

Networking. The director of the collaborating centre for mass gatherings reflected on networking within and outside Saudi Arabia and recommended going beyond communicable disease control to include noncommunicable diseases, maternal and child health, and emergency training for times of crisis in the Region. The participants

emphasized need for a platform or facilitator role that links or networks collaborating centres in the Region.

The group work discussed several important issues: ensuring that collaborating centre work plans and related activities are aligned with strategic priorities of WHO; improving collaboration among collaborating centres in common areas of work; challenges and suggested solutions with respect to (re)designation process; and suggestions for improvements in the area of communications.

The groups emphasized the need for establishing a network for all collaborating centres in the where WHO could act as coordinating platform for collaboration between collaborating centres. They highlighted the importance of familiarity with terms of reference of collaborating centres working in the same area and need for meetings of all collaborating centres on an annual basis. The participants also emphasized the importance of teamwork between different parties at national, regional and global levels.

3. Action points

For collaborating centres working in the same area

- Ensure complementarity (language, tools, methods) where relevant.
- Share experiences and results of concurrent research.

For WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

- Clarify the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each collaborating centre.

- Promote the activities of collaborating centres to other countries of the Region.
- Encourage harmonization of work.
- Coordinate performance follow-up.
- Set up a communications platform through existing and new platforms (e.g. sharepoint, website, newsletter) which could facilitate information and experience sharing and exchange between collaborating centres.
- Support the relevant WHO strategy, goals and programmes of work; promoting the activities of collaborating centres in relation to their terms of reference and country needs.
- Assist in joint fund-raising.
- Benchmark and look for best practices.
- Assist in updating terms of reference to fit with WHO's programme of work.
- Facilitate exchange of expertise between collaborating centres and set up external/peer evaluation as needed.

For WHO headquarters

- Support the activities of collaborating centres in the Region.
- Make use of individual experiences in term of techniques and procedures.
- Harmonize methods of work.
- Reinforce activities of the collaborating centres within countries.



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