

Summary report on the

Expert group meeting on regulation of nurses, midwives and allied health professionals

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Cairo, Egypt
8–10 December 2015



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Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized an expert group meeting in Cairo on 8–10 December 2015 to discuss practical steps to strengthen nursing, midwifery and allied health regulation in the Region. The meeting was attended by regional and international experts and representatives of allied health, nursing and midwifery regulatory councils, orders, accrediting bodies and ministries of health of countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The objectives of the meeting were:

- to describe the situation of nursing and midwifery regulation in the Eastern Mediterranean Region based on the findings of the Eastern Mediterranean regulation survey;
- to present successful experiences in regulation of the health workforce from within and outside the Region;
- to identify the priorities for strengthening the regulation of these three categories of professionals; and
- to identify and suggest actions to strengthen nursing and midwifery regulation in the three groups of countries; to suggest options for implementing robust regulatory policies and practices that will protect the health of the public.

The need for the meeting was identified during the regional forum on the future of nursing and midwifery, held in Amman, Jordan on 24 April 2015 under the patronage of HRH Princess Muna Al Hussein. Nursing and midwifery regulations were the subject of considerable discussion and debate during the forum, and were identified as among the key challenges impeding delivery of safe and competent nursing and midwifery care. Several feasible and appropriate solutions to tackle the obstacles that are impeding progress in these professions were identified.

The meeting was opened by Dr Jouaud Mahjour, Director Programme Management, who delivered a message from Dr Ala Alwan, WHO

Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his message Dr Alwan highlighted three important points: the crucial contribution of nurses, midwives and allied health in improving the health outcomes of individuals, families and communities; the great need of countries for feasible actions to strengthen health professionals' regulation to ensure that the public is provided with adequate, quality and safe health care; and the importance of looking at action points delineated in the framework for action on strengthening regulation to identify appropriate ways to assist countries in their efforts to establish or strengthen national regulatory agencies.

Over the three-day meeting, participants engaged actively in plenary discussions and group work, reflecting on the situation of health professionals regulation in the Region and on international experiences and best practices in strengthening regulatory processes. Opportunities were given to participants to discuss the short-, medium- and long-term action points outlined in the regional framework for action on strengthening nursing and midwifery 2015–2025.

2. Summary of discussions

Participants discussed the results of two regional surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015 on the situation of nursing, midwifery and allied health professions regulation and which formed the basis of the background paper presented to the meeting. Discussion of the current situation in the Region raised important issues on which extensive reflections and deliberations took place.

- The need to enhance the level of understanding and knowledge, among health professionals, legislators, policy-makers and planners, about modern health professions regulation.

- The importance of educating the public to become better informed about regulation, and how it affects them directly.
- The importance of empowering regulatory bodies to use ICT technologies to communicate with various stakeholders and policy makers about the roles and the benefits of the services which they provide.
- The need for visibility of regulation and regulatory bodies. This implies allocating sufficient levels of authority, responsibility, accountability, as well as the resources to implement arm of the regulatory system, including its governing body.
- The need for strengthening the link between professional regulation and quality improvement. This relationship needs to be understood by practitioners, managers, planners and policy-makers.
- Key functions of regulatory frameworks (registration, licensure, accreditation, standard-setting and professional discipline) and how sufficient powers and authority to enable the regulatory body to act to fulfil its responsibilities can be attained.
- The need for promoting more professional and effective management of the regulatory processes.
- The need to invest in regulators with the required skill sets, staff training as well as paying greater attention to preparing the governing body to carry out its role.

Country experiences were shared on developing and strengthening nursing and midwifery and allied health professionals regulation from selected Member States (Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan, United Arab Emirates). In addition international experiences and good practices were shared by international experts, who presented various models, frameworks and strategies used to strengthen nursing and midwifery as well as regulatory bodies for health professionals in other countries such as the United States and some in the African Region. The

presenters emphasized the importance of understanding the situation of regulation in each country to be able to identify needs and where to start or how to continue in the journey of regulation processes. They also emphasized that regulation is an area that needs to be dynamic, flexible and transparent and that must be developed, strengthened and institutionalized in the countries. The case studies provided useful information to other Member States to identify gaps and deficiencies in their systems. Examples of models and strategies were also presented and discussed, especially mapping the progress of regulatory processes, systems or frameworks, and how countries can engage different stakeholders at the national and regional levels in developing regulatory bodies. Collaborative efforts and partnerships need to be promoted to assess different countries in their efforts to develop and improve their regulatory systems.

During the discussions on the current situation of nursing and midwifery regulation participants debated how the different successful initiatives from other countries could be adapted in the Region. They identified several challenges and proposed strategies to overcome them. Challenges include lack of political support and commitment, ineffective lobbying and advocacy, poor understanding of regulations, fragmentation of regulatory functions and lack of knowledge on regulations and professionalism. Strategies proposed by the participants included the following:

- strengthening leadership of regulators, and other stakeholders including the health professionals themselves;
- promoting collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders at the national and regional levels;
- building capacity of regulators and advocacy among the political groups; and

- developing a clear understanding of where each country stands from regulation processes and developing a road map based on the priorities and the context of the country.

The meeting dedicated a session to identifying the essential characteristics of effective regulations such as targets of effective regulations, who regulates, what should be regulated and the power of effective regulation. A variety of functions were identified but participants noted that it would be difficult for the whole range of functions to be performed by one body established for this purpose in all countries. The group agreed that there is a need to develop core functions of regulatory bodies that are applicable to all countries. Proposed functions include the following.

- setting standards of nursing practice
- collecting fees
- registering and licencing of professionals
- representing the profession
- take disciplinary actions
- implementing professional code of ethics
- setting ethical standards for clinical research
- setting standards of education and practice
- accreditation of educational institutes

Advancing the regional framework for action, specifically the second strategic direction related to strengthening regulatory capacity, was the subject of lengthy debate and reflections. Participants discussed possible country actions regarding the three priorities outlined in the framework: 1) establishing or strengthening a national nursing and midwifery council/board; 2) ensuring effective implementation of key regulatory processes; and 3) establishing partnerships and collaborative relationships with national health workforce departments and with regulatory bodies in

other countries. Specific country actions needed were identified as follows.

- establishing a steering committee to evaluate the current status of regulation
- developing and using an assessment tool for the evaluation
- setting a plan of action based on the assessment and identified priorities
- developing a national database within the regulatory body
- setting up communications and awareness plans for health professionals and the public
- integrating regulation concepts into educational programmes
- developing a structure or process to promote collaboration and coordination between relevant stakeholders
- developing a monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the progress on the agreed-upon actions
- designing an advocacy plan for decision-makers

At the regional level, the participants proposed establishing a regional network or a platform to share experiences, knowledge and best practices, developing a tool to evaluate the current status of health professionals regulation to be used by the individual countries and developing an index of national and regional experts in the field of regulation.

The last session was dedicated to sharing and exchanging different resources available on regulation at the national and regional levels. The experts discussed several resources that could be useful for the countries to set health professions regulations: nursing, midwifery and other professional resources from regional and international websites, tools, guidelines, models and frameworks in the areas of regulation and continuing professional education materials, among others, shared

by the individual countries. Participants concluded with a list of action points for the way forward at country and regional level.

3. The way forward

Country level

- Analyse the status of health professionals regulation and monitor the progress regularly. To this end some available tools can be adapted to the regional and country context.
- Collaborate and network with other countries to learn from each other's' experiences and good practices.
- Develop country level advocacy and communication plans to support implementation of national regulatory systems.
- Strengthen capacities of regulatory bodies involved in nursing and midwifery regulation and accelerate implementation of regulatory frameworks, including:
 - reviewing current legislative frameworks, governance and organizational structures;
 - reviewing and improving adequacy of the current registration and licensure processes;
 - developing/reviewing and improving the operational and business processes;
 - engaging stakeholders; and
 - ensuring a link between regulation of education and practice.

Regional level

- Share and disseminate this expert group meeting outputs widely.
- Facilitate collaboration and information sharing on health professionals regulation among Member States.
 - Develop a platform to share and exchange knowledge between and among health professionals on regulation and other areas.

- Develop/adapt a regional model/tool for assessing and monitoring the status and progress of health professional regulatory systems in Member States.
- Pilot and validate the model/tool in selected countries.
- Promote research to provide evidence to improve health professionals regulation.
- Provide technical cooperation with Member States in establishing/strengthening national health professional regulatory bodies.
- Develop a policy brief outlining policy options for nursing and midwifery regulation on various key elements of a regulatory system.



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