

Summary report on the

# Informal expert consultation on health professionals' education

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3 June 2016



**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

The number of physicians in the population has increased significantly in the last two decades in the majority of Member States in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. There has also been a rapid increase, especially since 1990, in the number of medical schools, with private medical schools doubling in number since 2000. However, the improvement in densities has not kept up with the increase in population in a number of countries. At the same time, ensuring the quality and relevance of medical education remains a major challenge. Several broader factors are shaping the context health professionals' education and practice, including the changing burden of disease, the fast growing privatization of health care, the increasing expectations of patients and communities, and political instability and conflict.

In response to this situation, WHO undertook a comprehensive review of undergraduate medical education in order to identify the challenges it faces in the Region, determine priorities and develop a framework for action. On the basis of the review's findings, the 62nd WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted, in October 2015, resolution EM/RC62/R.4, including a regional framework for action on medical education.

The framework for action identifies strategic priorities and outlines short- and medium-term actions for countries and for WHO support towards reforming medical education. The resolution also requested that a high-level regional meeting be organized between ministers of health and ministers of higher education to achieve the higher level of coordination and collaboration necessary for the effective implementation of the regional framework. To this end, a high-level meeting is planned in late 2016.

In preparation for the planned ministerial meeting, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized an informal expert consultation meeting on health professionals' education. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- present the regional framework for action on medical education and get feedback on the appropriateness of the framework for the Region;
- agree on an initial draft of the agenda by identifying issues which need to be addressed in coordination with both ministries and propose solutions; and
- propose and elaborate on the expected outcomes of the ministerial meeting.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

### *The regional framework for action on medical education*

The participants welcomed the framework for action, acknowledging that it mainly guides action at an institutional level and that the ministerial meeting will also address system issues to provide an enabling environment for the implementation of the framework for action. Addressing most of the system-related challenges requires the coordination of both ministries of health and higher education, as well as other relevant ministries.

The purpose of medical education was discussed in relation to the framework for action. It was felt to be important to link medical education to community and country needs, ensure social accountability and embrace transformative health professional education. The reform of medical education should contribute to the universal health coverage and Sustainable Development Goal agendas.

It was also felt that while the ministerial meeting should focus on undergraduate medical education, the proposed action would also be applicable to the education of other health professionals.

*Key challenges in relation to medical education*

Key challenges in relation to medical education were identified. These include those in the area of the governance of medical education, such as the disconnect existing between medical education and practice, which is a common challenge in many countries. It was noted that an analysis of the cause of the problem would be helpful.

Another challenge is the involvement of several different players in education, as is the increasing private sector involvement in medical education, with the mushrooming of private medical schools without proper scrutiny. Regulation of new medical schools is deficient and comprehensive guidelines are lacking.

In terms of planning medical education capacities, the requirements of the future health workforce and labour market dynamics are not always taken into account. Investment in medical education is, in general, low. Coordination between ministries of health and higher education is also needed in postgraduate education to align capacities with undergraduate education and health service needs.

Many medical schools lack an adequate academic teaching hospital and ensuring appropriate clinical training settings requires close collaboration between the ministries of higher education and health. The governance of university hospitals also falls between both ministries.

Faculty capacity, in terms of quantity and quality, requires improvement in most countries. There are concerns about the quality of medical education, with weak accreditation systems in most countries and most medical schools using outdated curricula and educational approaches.

### *Agenda for the meeting*

Based on the identified challenges, it was felt that the following themes should be included in the agenda of the ministerial meeting.

- Governance of medical education, including overcoming the disconnect between health professionals' education and practice, improving coordination and collaboration, harnessing labour market dynamics and enhancing the governance of teaching hospitals.
- Improving the quality of medical education through accreditation.
- Regulation of the private sector.
- Financing medical education and improving investment in it.

### *Expected outcomes of the ministerial meeting*

The ministerial meeting should address those issues that require the coordination and collaboration of both ministries to ensure the system changes needed to enable the implementation of the regional framework for action on medical education, as well as for improvements in the education of other health professionals.

The expected outcomes of the meeting include a statement/declaration that outlines agreed action points to achieve the coordination and collaboration necessary for the effective implementation of the regional framework on medical education. The statement could



include a political commitment to strengthen and invest in health professionals' education, and therefore, the health workforce, and a commitment to the implementation of the regional framework for action on medical education, and for joint accountability and monitoring of progress.

It could also address the creation of an enabling system environment for all stakeholders to move the agenda forward and mechanisms for better coordination, such as an inter-ministerial committee, and the pre-conditions for the effectiveness of such a committee.

The harnessing of labour market dynamics and anticipating current and future health workforce needs could also be included, to ensure an adequate number, skill mix and quality of the health workforce. This would require close collaboration between the two ministries in planning education capacities, including admission numbers and criteria.

Moreover, the statement should address the expansion of clinical training settings, with an emphasis on primary care facilities, in collaboration between both ministries. Rethinking the way health professionals are educated, transforming health professionals' education, and strengthening regulatory frameworks and mechanisms, including the accreditation of health professionals' education, could also be included.

A second outcome of the meeting could be tools or guidance documents to support and guide the implementation of the agreed action points. Considering the significant increase of medical schools in the last two decades, especially private medical schools, and the great variation in quality, participants agreed on the value of some common criteria to guide the establishment of new medical schools.

The participants reviewed the draft criteria developed by the World Federation for Medical Education and made suggestions for improvement.

Regulation and accreditation of health professionals' education are generally weak or non-existent in the Region. Regional standards and a roadmap to strengthening the accreditation of health professionals' education in the Region would be useful in this regard. A review of the current situation and some recommendations on the strengthening of health professionals' education could be developed for further consultation.

### **3. The way forward**

- Continue preparations for the meeting and finalize a decision on its venue and timing.
- Draft a ministerial statement on the basis of the discussions and share for consultation with experts and Member States. The statement should be agreed and signed by the Ministers of Health and Higher Education, providing a clear vision on key areas for effective collaboration between the two ministries.
- Revise the draft criteria for the establishment of new medical schools on the basis of the discussions and comments, and open for further consultation prior to discussion at the ministerial meeting.
- Develop background documents, including on the governance of medical education and accreditation of medical schools in the Region.



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