



**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

August 2017

**Sixty-fourth Session
Islamabad, Pakistan, 9-12 October 2017**

**DEVELOPING NATIONAL CAPACITY FOR RESEARCH AND ETHICS TO
IMPROVE DECISION-MAKING FOR HEALTH**

Objectives of the event

The objectives are to:

- highlight the importance of creating a culture of using research evidence in health-policy-making;
- discuss modern concepts in translating evidence into practice within health care systems;
- build consensus on recommended actions to further develop national capacity on research methods/ethics and utilization of research evidence in public health practice.

Background

To maximize the use of available resources, health policy-makers need reliable up-to-date evidence about “what works.” Good decisions on effective health-related policies, setting of priorities and strategic planning require timely, accurate, and relevant information. Therefore, health research is needed to turn existing knowledge into practical applications. While substantial attention has been focused by WHO on the importance of ethical health research and creating evidence for universal health coverage;¹ properly designed and implemented health research is not used enough for planning effective strategies for improving health outcomes, especially in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The 2013 *World Health Report* called for greater collaboration between health researchers and policy-makers, requiring that research is taken outside of academic institutions into public health programmes that are close to health services, research capacity at national level is developed and comprehensive codes of good and ethical research practice are put in place. Unfortunately, the quality and quantity of research in countries of the Region is not commensurate with the needs of its populations, and is less oriented towards fulfilling people’s health needs. Weak research stewardship is also a major issue that needs to be properly addressed.²

Ethics has a significant impact on the standards for disease management. Applying ethical standards to health care decision-making decreases health care costs and improves satisfaction with health care service delivery. National and institutional capacity-building in applying ethical principles in health research and health care delivery and targeting

¹ World Health Report: Research for Universal Health Coverage. Geneva: WHO; 2013.

² Strategic directions for scaling up research for health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: World Health Organization; October 2011 (EM/RC58/R.3).

researchers and practitioners, respectively, ensures better outcomes and sound health policy-making. Moreover, establishment and empowerment of research ethics committees ensure proper governance and oversight of health research implementation within and outside health care delivery institutions.

A regional bioethics survey was conducted by the Regional Office which aimed to map the current situation of bioethics in Member States and identify areas of progress in bioethics for each country. The survey highlighted some key challenges, including: low level of bioethics education; high level of illiteracy among patients; lack of resources in field of bioethics, application of research ethics and monitoring ongoing research; lack of coordination among different bodies which deal with misconduct or claims; insufficient bylaws/regulations especially for ethics in organ transplantation; and lack of consistency of the regulations and practices between different institutions and misunderstanding of the roles of Research Ethics Committees, i.e. confusion about authorship regulations and ethics review.

In April 2017, the first regional bioethics summit convened in Muscat, Oman, discussed methods of regional collaboration, with special focus on development and work of national ethics/bioethics committees; developing strategies to strengthen linkages between the bioethics committees and health policy-makers; sharing experiences on relevant health-related ethical issues such as: ethics during disasters and emergencies (e.g. resilience/response of health systems to migration; research ethics).

Way forward

The WHO Regional Office pays special attention to the strategic importance of health research capacity-building and knowledge transfer and translation in promoting evidence-based policy-making. Evidence-based and informed decision-making will not happen without translating evidence into reliable, sustainable, widespread practice. Hence, there is a need to build national capacity on research methods and ethics to support the uptake of evidence and translation of knowledge into ethical practice taking into account the local context (health care delivery system, determinants of health and individuals' behaviour).

Expected outcomes of the meeting

- Increased recognition of the importance of research evidence in health policy-making and translating evidence into reliable, sustainable, widespread ethical practice in improving health outcomes.
- Consensus reached on the need for establishment of regional/national mechanisms to support health research methods and ethics capacity-building; bridge gaps between research institutions and policy-makers, and translate research evidence into policy statements for Member States in the Region.
- Agreement reached on the need to foster development of national ethics/bioethics committees, as well as institutional review boards in support of evidence-based health policy-making.