

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

October 2019

Sixty-sixth Session

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 14–17 October 2019

**EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA IN FAMILY
MEDICINE**

Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to:

- highlight the need to establish bridging programmes on family medicine in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; and
- discuss possible strategies to introduce the Regional Professional Diploma in Family Medicine at country level.

Background

The value of strengthening primary health care through a family practice-based approach is becoming increasingly recognized at global, regional and country level as a way of providing high-quality essential health services in an integrated and equitable manner, supported by a qualified and well-trained health workforce. Adequate production of well-trained family physicians has emerged as a major global challenge: most countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and around the world do not have sufficient numbers of family physicians. In the Region, most existing undergraduate medical curricula do not even introduce students to the basic concepts of family medicine. A number of regional resolutions have called on Member States to strengthen the capacity of family medicine departments and increase the number of family physicians as a strategy to strengthen universal health coverage and make progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.

The technical paper “Scaling up family practice in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: progressing towards universal health coverage” (EM/RC63/Tech.Disc.1), presented to the 63rd session of the Regional Committee, was followed by adoption of resolution EM/RC63/R.2 requesting Member States to “establish bridging programmes for general physicians”.

A major policy shift is required in the Region to sensitize decision-makers to the significance of family physicians, their contribution to strengthening primary health care and the development of strategies to increase the number of family physicians. At the same time, there is a need to upgrade the skills of existing general practitioners to make them compatible with the fundamental concepts of family medicine.

Challenges

Family medicine faces multifaceted challenges in the Region, ranging from the need to recognise the specialty as a discipline, to integrating it into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula and training existing general physicians on the basic concepts of family medicine.

Production of family physicians in the Region is low. In 2016, there were just 22 postgraduate family physicians in the entire Region. Governments need to develop strategies to redesign educational curricula to produce more family physicians. The Eastern Mediterranean Region has almost 250 000 general physicians; 93% of primary health care facilities are managed by them and they have no formal training in family medicine.

As an interim arrangement, Member States need to establish short-term bridging programmes to introduce the basic concepts of family medicine to existing general physicians and upgrade them to family physicians. They also need to develop postgraduate programmes to cover the shortage of family physicians.

WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region will provide technical support to Member States to develop short-term and long-term programmes in family medicine that can be readily customized to local population needs and align them with each country's existing primary health care system. Most Member States have limited capacity in developing hybrid programmes with the appropriate mix of face-to-face and online teaching and learning components.

Expected outcomes

- Member States will be familiarized with the new WHO family practice programme.
- Identification of possible strategies to introduce the Professional Diploma in Family Medicine at country level.