



Message from

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on the occasion of
WORLD FAMILY DOCTOR DAY

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It is with great pleasure that the World Health Organization joins the World Organization of Family Doctors, known as WONCA, and Member States in celebrating World Family Doctor Day.

This occasion highlights the crucial role of family doctors in health care systems around the world.

Now is the time to reaffirm the importance of family practice programmes designed to provide quality primary health care and accelerate progress towards universal health coverage in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma-Ata, which identified primary health care as essential to attain Health for All. On 25–26 October 2018, the world will come together to renew a commitment to strengthening primary health care to achieve universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. That commitment will be expressed in a new Declaration.

The 40th Anniversary Conference will emphasize the need to modernize primary health care and address current and future challenges in health systems while maintaining the core values and principles represented in the original Alma-Ata Declaration in 1978.

WHO recognizes family practice as a strategic priority to strengthen health systems, and WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is undertaking many activities to promote and support it.

The Regional Office is developing a model of primary health care which has family practice at its core. The Integrated District Health System (IDHS) initiative will make district health authorities responsible for managing service delivery at district level, based on a family practice approach. Port Said Governorate, Egypt, will be the first site to implement IDHS, followed by selected districts in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan and Sudan.

WHO is also producing a range of information resources on family practice in the Region to support the work of health care professionals and inform policy discussions. Materials released in the past year have included training manuals, operational guides, country profiles and advocacy videos.

This year, WHO is collaborating with WONCA to publish “Family practice in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: universal health coverage and quality primary care”, a new book for policy-makers, health professionals, health educators and health profession students. The book examines how to improve primary care in high, middle and low income nations, and in nations experiencing the challenges of conflict and crisis. As well as detailed country studies, it will include chapters analysing key themes in family practice across the Region. The new book will be launched in October 2018 and a second, updated edition is already planned for 2020.

The Regional Office is also taking action to help overcome a shortage of family doctors in the Region. In collaboration with the American University of Beirut, it has developed a six-month online course in family medicine for currently practising general practitioners as a transitional approach to full training of family physicians. Other WHO initiatives to improve health financing and service delivery in the Region include building capacity in designing, financing and delivering health services and priority benefit “packages”, a set of health services with appropriate delivery platforms and adequate prepayment mechanisms.

There are many challenges in nurturing family practice and ensuring access to health care in the Region, but WHO remains committed to supporting countries in scaling up family practice as part of strengthening primary health care to achieve universal health coverage.