



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**

**DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**  
**to the**  
**FOURTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDICAL JOURNALS**  
**IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

Manama, Bahrain, 5–7 November 2008

Your Excellency, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Fourth Regional Conference on Medical Journals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO. The conference has been organized by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Journal of the Bahrain Medical Society, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Bahrain, and the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME). I would like to thank H.E. Dr Faisal Bin Yaqoub Al-Hamer, Minister of Health of Bahrain and his staff for his support for this conference. Let me also thank our local organizer, the Journal of the Bahrain Medical Society who so kindly offered to host this event, as well as the many other local sponsors whose support has enabled this conference to take place. I would like to welcome all the participants from across the Region and beyond who have made the effort to join us here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the fourth in a series of conferences that have been held in the Region since 2003 by WHO and its partners. Many of you are now stalwart participants and we are delighted to see you, both on a personal basis, and because it reflects the value and scale of the networking that has taken place over the past few years.

This is a year of celebration: 60 years of WHO; 30 years since the beginning of the primary health care movement. What you may not realize is that it is also exactly 30 years since the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean—WHO's governing body in the Region—mandated the Regional Office "to take steps for the consolidation

of the resources and services of the WHO regional medical library and the development of a viable network for biomedical journals” (EM/RC28A/R.9). This was a significant step. It resulted in the establishment of the Index Medicus for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, which today fills a major gap in international indexing and abstracting services and brings visibility to the health and biomedical research conducted and published in the Region. The first index, published in 1987, covered just 70 journals from the Region. It now covers 408 peer-reviewed journals from 19 countries of the 22 countries of the Region and has indexed over 91 000 articles and, since 2005 over 39 000 abstracts have been added with the new records. The index also covers online journals—181 so far, of which 3 are entirely electronic with no print version.

Our support to regional journals has been scaled up further in recent years. The Regional Office subsidises subscription to many journals in the Region for libraries and institutions. It provides links to online journals in the index through its own virtual health library. The contents of the regional index and these online journals are visible to the world through the Google Scholar search facility. Your journals are accessible to the world’s researchers.

Since the mid 1990s we have supported training for researchers and editors. Next year we plan to hold the first regional training course for training of trainers of medical journal editors. I have no doubt some of you will be interested to take part in the initiative, which is a commitment to the long-term development of journals in the Region. As you know, the Regional Office was also instrumental in ensuring the EMAME network was able to get off the ground. There are now 169 confirmed members of the Association, with applications increasing as more people hear about it. There are however some gaps in membership which indicate that more work needs to be done to reach potential members. For example Egypt, which accounts for almost half of the articles indexed in the IMEMR, has very few member editors in EMAME. I am sure that all of you here today will do your part to reach out to potential members in all the countries of the Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More important by far than what has been achieved, is why. WHO’s objective for 60 years—its mandate from its 193 Member States—is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. This means that WHO is most concerned with the health of populations and thus with the decisions that affect the health of nations, individually, and collectively. It means that WHO is concerned with ensuring that all population groups have fair and equal access to health care, and have the ability to protect their health. A major part of this involves research into what prevents people from attaining the highest possible health and the generation and sharing of information. But for that information to have a positive impact on health outcome it has to reach the people who can take the decisions and the necessary action to ensure the

health system responds. It is this gap—known as the know-do gap—that led the Region’s health ministers, when they met in Cairo last month as the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, to endorse a resolution on bridging the gap between health researchers and policy-makers.

The Regional Committee urged Member States “to design and develop inclusive and participatory national strategies for health research involving all the main players” (EM/RC55/R.7). The editors of medical journals are main players. You have a crucial role to play in helping to bridge the gap between researchers and policy-makers. However, there are tough issues to be addressed here. First you need good quality research material. This means research that addresses questions that are important to the community and the nation, questions that are relevant and timely. The content of many journals currently reflects the narrow interests of university researchers who need to publish to achieve promotion. This is understandable but journals can do more than simply act as conduits. Journal editors can be proactive. This means engaging with the policy-makers to understand what is needed, and with the research community to encourage research in areas that matter to the health of the nation, and committing to publish such research.

It also means having a peer review system that is able to evaluate the articles submitted, it means meeting quality criteria such as regularity in publication, and it means visibility through being indexed, at national, regional, and if possible international level. Finally it means attracting readership. Of course this is a two way relationship. Policy-makers, health systems decision-makers and practitioners need to encourage, demand even, journals to deliver the information they need in a way they can make use of it. And policy-makers who want to solve their country’s health problems need to read the journals, they need to engage with researchers and editors not only to identify the problems and find the solutions but to promote translation of knowledge into policy and practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this conference is “Research and publication are cornerstones of health care development in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”. With each regional conference on medical journals held since 2003, we have enjoyed the collaboration of local institutions and journals. This has enabled us to expand the network of editors and researchers in the region who understand and care about the need to share knowledge. With this fourth regional conference, we look forward to continuing that mission. I hope you will work with us to ensure that medical journals do their part to bridge the know-do gap.

Thank you