



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

Regional Consultation on Accreditation of Health Professions Education

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Tunis, Tunisia, 22–24 November 2011

Your Excellency Minister of Health,
President of the World Federation for Medical Education,
Chair, Association of Arab Faculties of Medicine,
President of the Association of Medical Education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region,
Deans of medical schools, honourable professionals and scientists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to this regional consultation on accreditation of health professions education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Let me first thank the Government of Tunisia and His Excellency the Minister of Health for hosting this important consultation. The focus of this meeting – accreditation – is indeed timely, if not overdue. Accreditation is recognized today, worldwide, as a tool for maintaining and continuously improving the quality of education, institutions, their programmes and products. It strengthens professional governance and the power for self-regulation. In the educational field, accreditation is vital to ensure that institutions are functioning at recognizable standards which enable them to graduate capable, skilled and caring health care professionals, and that institutions are complying with recognized global, regional and national quality improvement standards.

The question for us today is: do institutions of higher health education in our Region produce graduates who are fit to practise in the 21st century? Studies and research suggest that the old approach to teaching is no longer appropriate or acceptable for the production of doctors, nurses and other health professionals who are capable of managing the increasingly rapid changes taking place every day in the domain of health practice.

In addition to mastering core clinical competencies, graduates today are required to perform a range of non-clinical, and even non-health-related competencies, in areas such as management and leadership, information technology, e-learning modalities, among others. Such skills are today considered basic prerequisites for any health professional. Moreover, and for health professions in particular, such concepts as cultural competencies and social accountability are also important to ensure graduates are in tune with the needs of populations and communities they serve. Therefore, we need to make use of all available means and methods to ensure that our graduates are capable of practising in the reality of a changing world. At the same time, we live now in a global community and accreditation is viewed as one of the best tools to keep our academic institutions both competitive and up to the globally recognized standards.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the challenges which our Region faces, I would like to highlight some of the successes which we can be proud of. The Region has been a pioneer in seeking to support and engage with the medical and other health professions academia in the national and regional health development agenda. It is internationally recognized for pioneering work in medical education and for its innovation in such crucial areas as community-oriented, problem-based and student-centered learning. However, the role of academic institutions in improving the health of their populations can only be fully realized when their technical capacities are also strengthened and developed to the full. This can be achieved through effective accreditation mechanisms in each country. I hope that this important meeting will have an impact in this respect.

Since the 1988 Edinburgh Declaration on the reform of medical education, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has been working in close collaboration with the World Federation of Medical Education to promote reform of medical education in the Region. In 2003, accreditation of health professions education institutions in the Region was

launched with endorsement of a resolution by the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (EM/RC50/R.9). The role of the Regional Office in supporting medical and other health professions education development in the Region is well recognized, and acknowledged, within and outside the health professions education constituency. In this regard, the initiative to establish national and regional accreditation systems for medical education and health personnel education is a natural successor to previous regional initiatives to harmonize and improve standards of institutions, and programmes as well as of their graduates. Accreditation systems can provide a valuable mechanism in linking educational programmes and methods to societal needs and to the principles of social accountability. I am pleased to report that, so far, 16 countries in the Region have started accreditation-related initiatives, including development of accreditation plans and national mechanisms. These are Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, the occupied Palestinian territory, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. As shown in your meeting programme, in addition to presenting and sharing best national, regional and international lessons and practice, special sessions have been planned for capacity-building.

I anticipate that with the increasing demand to establish effective national accreditation schemes, this meeting will produce country-specific plans for accreditation. The Regional Office, in close cooperation with the Association of Medical Education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, will support and facilitate effective and sustainable regional coordination among national accreditation systems. I am pleased to know that regional accreditation guidelines with valid standards have been prepared and will be presented for endorsement in this meeting. I therefore hope that this meeting will represent a landmark and significant step for improved quality, relevance, equity and cost-effectiveness of health professions education in the Region.

The issue of using national languages as a medium in health professional education is vital, both for improving standards of learning as well as for cultivating and disseminating scientific knowledge within our culture. I hope accreditation systems will encourage use of local languages rather than foreign languages, which can be a barrier to communication with the communities health professions serve. All of us are aware of WHO's goal of achieving health for all through the primary health care approach-based health system. This approach is essentially based on engaging the active participation of communities in their own health

affairs. How can a community respond to such a call when addressed in a language that all its members do not understand?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome the revitalization of the Association of Medical Education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region as a branch of the World Federation of Medical Education. I am pleased that this meeting is being organized jointly by the Regional Office and the Association and that the elected president and executive committee members are with us today. We look forward to further cooperation. I welcome also the participation of the Scientific Society of Arab Deans of Medical Schools of the Arab Universities Union and all other partner organizations.

The expectations are high, the challenges are tremendous. I am confident that, with your commitment, expertise and country insight, you will be able to fully achieve the primary objective of this important meeting, which is to strengthen the nascent national systems of accreditation in the Region and assure their compatibility and harmonization with global standards.

I look forward to receiving your recommendations. I wish you every success in achieving the objectives of this critical meeting and a pleasant stay here in Tunisia.