Letter from the Editor

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma-Ata, the Member States of the World Health Organization in the Eastern Mediterranean Region reaffirmed in the Qatar Declaration in November 2008 that the primary health care approach is the main strategy to achieve better health and well-being for the people of the Region. The Member States reiterated their commitment to primary health care and its values and principles of universal access and coverage, based on equity and social justice, community involvement and health as a basic human right. As part of the implementation of the Qatar Declaration, which called for partnership with academia and civil society organizations to support public health and primary health care revival, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean convened a meeting to gather academicians and researchers in public health together with policy-makers in Beirut in December 2009.

In the Beirut meeting, the role of academia in support of public health covering training, research and practice was highlighted, the areas of potential support in the Region were deliberated upon, and the limited use of research findings in policy analysis and development was discussed.

A particular focus of the meeting was sharing of the experience of networking among academic institutions in the Region. In this context the Maghreban Network on Health Systems and Health Services provided a good model, underscoring the contribution of academic institutions to training of health professionals on the use of analytical tools to generate evidence on health care financing and burden of disease analysis.

One of the major outcomes of the Beirut meeting was a consensus among the participants to establish a Regional Network of Academic Institutions in support of public health and revival of primary health care in the Region. It was recommended that the Regional Office support the Network in order to facilitate its growth through its promotion inside and outside the Region as well as through collaborative activities for training, research and practice.

Partnership of WHO EMRO with some academic and research institutions has contributed in the past to capacity development in the Region as well as institutional strengthening of ministries of health at national and subnational levels. The proposed Regional Network will help strengthen collaboration between academia and research institutions for their joint input to policy-making for health care in the Region.

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