The benefits of breastfeeding for most newborns and infants cannot be overstated. Not only does breast milk provide the ideal nutrients for a baby, it is readily available and affordable. Moreover, breastfeeding is beneficial to mothers; it helps them lose excess weight gained in pregnancy and reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Many women, however, experience initial difficulties with breastfeeding and so need help and encouragement to start and persevere. Therefore, the World Breastfeeding Week is held annually from 1 to 7 August to promote breastfeeding and improve the well-being of babies around the world.

For babies born in hospital, promotion of and help with breastfeeding is part of the maternity care that should be provided and is an indicator of the quality of care. In this issue, we include a paper on the quality of maternity care in a government teaching versus a government non-teaching hospital in Islamic Republic of Iran. The study found that the quality of the care received, as reported by mothers, was better in the non-teaching hospital, including instruction on breastfeeding. There are implications for medical education; doctors, nurses and other health professionals receive their clinical training in teaching hospitals and it is important that good practices are evident in these settings and reinforce the theory learned. Two papers about medical education in Saudi Arabia are published in the current issue, one determining and prioritizing competencies in the internal medicine curriculum and the other reviewing medical education in the country.

Beyond the usual health care responsibilities, health care workers may be faced with exceptional challenges if disasters (whether natural or man-made) or emergency situations occur. They, together with other humanitarian workers, are called upon to lend assistance to alleviate the suffering of people caught in the turmoil. Our Region has experienced and continues to experience numerous complex and large-scale emergencies, some very long-running and some only recently arisen. To deal with these has required the expertise and dedication of countless humanitarian workers over many years.

On 19 August the World Health Organization and other international bodies celebrate World Humanitarian Day to highlight the crucial tasks performed by humanitarian workers and remember aid workers who have been killed or injured while performing their vital work.