Obituary

Dr Peter Salama

It is with immense sadness to commemorate the death of our dear colleague Dr Peter Salama, Executive Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Division for Universal Health Coverage – Life Course, who passed away suddenly on 23 January 2020 at the age of 51. A prominent Australian public health expert with family roots extending from the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Dr Salama joined WHO in 2016 as Executive Director of the Health Emergencies programme before leading WHO’s work on Universal Health Coverage globally. All through his work, Dr Salama focused on those most in need particularly in war-torn places where health services had collapsed. In the last six months, and together with the EM regional colleagues, he co-led two high-level missions to Palestine and Somalia in support of building resilient health systems. He has constantly focused on translating evidence into action and always aspired to remain connected with the field as he gained more senior and executive positions. The regional office will honor his legacy by continuing the work he started and extending it to other countries in the region so no one is left behind.

Pete was a role model for many and loved by those who had the chance to work with him. “Pete embodied everything that is best about WHO and the United Nations – professionalism, commitment and compassion,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

Before joining WHO, Dr Salama was Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at UNICEF. Dr Salama led UNICEF’s global response to Ebola, served as its Representative in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe (2009–2015), Chief of Global Health and Principal Advisor on HIV/AIDS in New York (2004–2009), and Chief of Health and Nutrition in Afghanistan (2002–2004). He had also worked with Médecins Sans Frontières and Concern Worldwide in several countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

In spite of all his multiple skills and accomplishments, Pete was above all a family man. He had a remarkable ability to achieve balance in his busy professional and personal lives. For him, family always came first. Dr Salama leaves behind his wife and three young sons, to whom the Organization extends its most profound sympathies and condolences.