

Event

Establishment of the National Network of WHO Collaborating Centres in Iran to Contribute to the National Public Health Needs

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World Health Organization Collaborating Centers (WHOCCs) are academic affiliated research centers, which are designated by the Director-General to support the WHO's plans and programs at national, regional and global levels. More than 700 WHOCCs across over 80 countries are currently working closely with the WHO on various health-related areas, including nursing, nutrition, communicable diseases, chronic diseases, occupational health, mental health, and health technologies, among others.¹ Nevertheless, it seems that WHOCCs have the potentials to implicitly respond to the national health challenges, through perhaps strong links with governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME).

Out of the 48 active WHOCCs in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), 16 are located in Iran. The Iranian WHOCCs cover a rainbow of health-related topics from molecular medicine, to management of communicable and non-communicable diseases and economic evaluation of health policies. Despite their significant contribution to informing WHO policies, guidelines and plans across the country, WHOCCs in Iran have been lacking a meaningful harmony among themselves as well as a strong link

with national health policy and decision-making frameworks.

Aiming to enhance efficient collaboration among Iranian WHOCCs and materializing their full potential, a joint meeting of all WHOCCs' leaders was convened with the presence of International Affairs Department and Deputy for Research and Technology at MoHME, in June 2014, in Tehran. The meeting enjoyed the support of WHO country office, as well as the attendance of Director of Knowledge, Ethics and Research from the WHO Head Quarter, and a representative from the Eastern Mediterranean Office. The meeting, the first of its kind in the history of WHOCC existence in Iran, created a vibrant platform to increase understanding and insight about the aims, procedures and expected contributions of such centers, as well as exploring potential avenues of collaboration among WHOCCs, MoHME, and others.

Building upon the 1st successful meeting, the 2nd meeting of the Iranian WHOCCs was hosted by the Regional Knowledge Hub, and WHO Collaborating Center for HIV Surveillance (HIVHUB), in February 2015, in Kerman. The event provided a more insightful opportunity to discuss the details of challenges and barriers facing collaborative polices amongst WHOCCs across the country and led to the development of feasible approaches in defining joint activities. A resolution was agreed upon at the closure of Kerman gathering, which urged MoHME to:

1. Establish a permanent secretariat to facilitate communications among WHOCCs;
2. Facilitate the development of a multimedia package on international collaboration in health research to showcase WHOCCs' best practices and help improve their international networks;
3. Foster design and execution of multi-central research projects;
4. Develop joint training courses and summits.

Although it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of such agreed initiatives, we have been witnessing an increasing level of electronic communications, virtual meetings, and online group discussions in the short period after the meeting. The establishment of WHOCCs' Secretariat within the MoHME will boost such activities and secure sustainability of such centers to fulfill their capacity to not only contribute to the WHO global agenda, but also address the national public health needs.

References

1. Available from: URL: <http://www.who.int/collaboratingcentres/en/>
2. Available from: URL: http://apps.who.int/whocc/List.aspx?cc_code=IRA

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Appendix I: WHO Collaborating Centers in the Islamic Republic of Iran.²

No	Title	Affiliation
1	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Cardiovascular Diseases Control, Prevention, and Rehabilitation for Cardiac Patients	Isfahan Cardiovascular Research Center
2	WHO Collaborating Center for Educational Development	Shaheed Beheshti University of Medical Sciences
3	WHO Collaborating Center for Education and Research in Nursing and Midwifery	Iran University of Medical Sciences
4	WHO Collaborating Center for HIV surveillance	Kerman University of Medical Sciences
5	WHO Collaborating Center for Mental Health	Teheran University of Medical Sciences
6	WHO Collaborating Center for Research & Training on Blood Safety	Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO)
7	WHO Collaborating Center for Quality Control and Clinical Chemistry	Ministry of Health and Medical Education
8	WHO Collaborating Center for Reference and Research on Rabies	Pasteur Institute of Iran
9	WHO Collaboration Center for Tuberculosis Education	Shaheed Beheshti University of Medical Sciences
10	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Education on Management of Osteoporosis and Diabetes	Teheran University of Medical Sciences
11	WHO Collaborating Center for Gastrointestinal Cancer	Teheran University of Medical Sciences
12	WHO Collaborating Center for Tobacco Control	National Research Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (NRITLD), Shaheed Beheshti University of Medical Sciences
13	WHO Collaborating Center for the Eye Health and Prevention of Blindness Programme	Shahid Beheshti Medical University
14	WHO Collaborating Center for Training and Research in Dental Public Health	Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences
15	WHO Collaborating Center for training and research on Health Management	Tabriz University of Medical Sciences
16	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Education on Hearing Loss	Iran University of Medical Sciences