

Message

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“It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Fifth Regional Conference on Medical Journals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO. The conference has been organized by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Pakistan Association of Medical Editors (PAME), in collaboration with the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan, the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME), Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi and the Aga Khan University, Karachi. I would like to thank the Federal Ministry of Health of Pakistan and the Higher Education Commission for their support for this conference and to welcome Professor Rashid Jooma, Director-General Health, and Dr Javaid Laghari, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission, who have made the time to join us here today.

Let me also thank our kind host, the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan, for providing these facilities and making us so welcome. I would like to welcome all the participants from Pakistan and from across the Region and beyond, old friends and new, who have made the effort to join us here today.

This is the fifth in the series of conferences held by WHO and its partners since 2003. With each successive conference, EMAME, the network of editors established since then, has grown and, I am pleased to see, its ambitions have not diminished. The members – all busy professionals – academics, researchers, physicians, nurses – have much in common. Here today, you have just one thing in common: a dedication to dissemination of good quality research, to attracting wider readership, to improving editorial standards, and to improving visibility of your journals in the face of fierce competition, regionally and globally.

In the coming three days you will share your research, knowledge and experience as journal editors. You will also, no doubt, discuss the aims of

EMAME and how you wish to shape the association in the future. This is the age of virtual social networking. It has never been so easy to communicate ideas, to share knowledge. But achievement of concrete results requires clear goals and strategy, and a continuing commitment to interaction.

The Regional Office remains committed to promoting quality of medical journals in the Region and to supporting the goals of the network. Of course WHO has an ulterior motive – a mandate from its 193 Member States—and that is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. Health research has a crucial role to play in achieving that goal. Health science journals, in turn, have a crucial role to play in disseminating the results of that research and thereby promoting the use of evidence in policy and decision-making for health. The Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research, at its 25th meeting held recently has emphasized the need for reliable and valid information as a priority in the Region. Without such information health policy-makers cannot make evidence-informed decisions. I have said it before... let me say again. The role of the editor does not stop at publishing research. Editors must also be advocates for research for health.

Since your last meeting in 2008, the Region has seen the establishment of two new networks relevant to your work. Indeed some of you may already be members of those networks. The first of these is the Eastern Mediterranean Evidence-Informed Policy Network EM-EVIPNet. This is a social and collaborative network that promotes the systematic use of health research evidence in policy-making. It promotes partnerships between policy-makers, researchers and civil society in order to facilitate both policy development and policy implementation through the use of the most reliable scientific evidence available. The second network is the Eastern Mediterranean Region Academic Institutions Network EMRAIN. The primary goal of EMRAIN is to promote education, research and practice that support the strengthening of health systems based on primary health care. EMRAIN is intended to serve as a regional hub for bridging the gap between research and policy in this area. While each of these networks, together with EMAME, has a different perspective, what is also striking is the commonality of purpose in addressing the same problem. That commonality is the promotion of research that can make a difference to people's health. I urge those of you who are able, to strike alliances and seek synergies where you can to promote this commonality of purpose.

At this point, let me note the participation in this conference for the first time of a number of representatives of ministries of health from around the Region. This is the first time we have welcomed participants to this conference who are not necessarily editors of health science journals. I hope you will take back the important messages that come out of this meeting and we look forward to hearing your perspectives on bridging the gap between researchers, editors and policy-makers.

Since the fourth regional conference in 2008, coverage of journals by the WHO Index Medicus for the Eastern Mediterranean Region has risen from 408 to 494 peer-reviewed journals. The index brings visibility not only to the health and biomedical research conducted and published in the Region, but to the journals themselves, with all citations from the index now searchable and accessible through Google Scholar. The Regional Office is constantly striving to improve this service and the speed of its indexing. However, the database is only as good as its content, and there are many gaps in that content. I urge all the editors here today to ensure that you keep your dispatches to the Regional Office indexing service up to date.

In the past year two important events took place. One was the publication of the manual for editors of health science journals, a copy of which is available for everyone during the conference. The manual has been well received regionally and globally and is available in English, French and Arabic so far. I hope we may see it translated into other languages of the Region also. Let me take this opportunity to thank all those members of EMAME who contributed to its development. The other event of note was the first regional training course for trainers in medical journal publishing. Ten trainers were trained from seven countries and would, I have no doubt, be pleased to work with you should you wish to arrange a local training course. A second course is planned. However, resources have dried up in the past year as a result of the global economic recession and as yet it is difficult to see when we might conduct this course. I welcome your suggestions as to how we may continue to take this initiative forward.

The theme of this conference is “Medical journalism: opportunities and challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”. In times of economic recession, the challenges are particularly acute. Resources to maintain journals may not be seen as a priority and you may find yourselves having to defend your existence. Paradoxically, this presents an opportunity to show the vital importance of journals to the dissemination of health research and to the attainment of health for all. I urge you to make good use of this opportunity.”