

Editorial

8th International Conference of High Institute of Public Health – Alex Health 2016

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Many falsely believe that since they can now access health information via the internet that the days of the live meetings are gone. The truth is, meetings are more important than ever. The value in meetings comes from the human to human connections that occur. As health professional you definitely choose from a long list of conferences which one to attend. Alex Health is considered the biggest event in the field of public health in Egypt. It's organized by the High Institute of Public Health (HIPH), Alexandria University, which is the oldest academic institution for public health and by far the largest in the Middle East since 1956.

Conferences usually provide a great opportunity to networking and to position yourself as an expert in your field. It can help you progress professionally in your career. The 8th International Conference of HIPH, Alex Health 2016 was a great opportunity to meet health professionals from the WHO, UNFPA, Population Council, Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Environmental Affairs and the different international and national universities.

Alex Health 2016 with the slogan "Think globally and act locally: Public health action in challenging times" was a great opportunity to learn about cutting edge research. It included two tracks, namely: the main themes of public health and green, sustainable healthy cities, with 22 scientific sessions covering WHO research priorities and strategies for health promotion; Egypt's health system reform and national health insurance program; updates in prevention and management of hepatitis C; challenges in reproductive health and family planning; prevention of non-communicable diseases; environmental challenges in Egypt, as well as Egypt's strategic plans for sustainable development 2030; in addition to a post-conference workshop in research methodology.

Conferences usually force you to break out of your comfort zone. Breaking out of your office or

classroom and getting involved in multidisciplinary discussions is just the type of action that is necessary to break out of old ways of thinking.

Visiting the conference exhibition is a good opportunity to get familiar with HIPH ongoing research projects, activities and community services, as well as our stakeholders for health development.

Conference organizers spend a great deal of time and effort making sure Alex Health is an enjoyable experience for all attendees. The international participants have a great chance to enjoy the beautiful city of Alexandria with its great history.

About 700 international and national health professionals attended Alex Health 2016. They definitely enriched the discussions and came up with the following recommendations:

Maintaining Alex Health International Conference every 2 years, in conjunction with leading public health networks

Fostering relations between HIPH and WHO/ UNFPA on regional/ country levels, towards building a Memo of Understanding for strategic cooperation between both parties

Fostering relations between the HIPH and regional public health networks, including: The Eastern Mediterranean Regional Academic Institutions Network for Public Health (EMRAIN); Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network: (EMPHNET) and Public Health in the Arab World (PHAW)

Addressing priority public health programs, as the national plan on fighting viral hepatitis, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), patient safety, blood and injection safety, surveillance, emergency preparedness and response and road safety.

Implementation of the new universal Social Health Insurance (SHI) with its mandated health system reform by:

- Finalizing the law and ensuring coherence and harmony of its articles, between its articles and the new vision for the health system structure, between its articles and other related legislations (such as civil service law, other autonomous entities, etc.)
- Establishing informed service pricing and payment systems and implementing dynamic benefits' package
- Regulating private providers and have them engaged with new SHI by accreditation
- Working immediately on improving quality of public sector services: Family health model, secondary and tertiary care
- Addressing health system gaps particularly: Health financing and Health workforce, especially at the peripheral level. We need to think about collaboration between WHO, medical syndicate and HIPH for qualifying primary health care (PHC) physicians.
- Strengthening of health information system (Civil Registration and Vital Statistics & eHealth, etc.)

Prevention and management of NCDs by:

- Enforcing NCDs preventive strategies by stressing on prevention and surveillance of common risk factors especially for Coronary Artery Diseases to achieve WHO target of reducing mortality rate by 25% by 2025 (25/25).
- Training of health personnel on early detection, premordial prevention and secondary prevention to optimize control of rheumatic heart diseases.
- Cervical cancer screening programs, although life-saving for a number of women, are not a sufficiently high priority in our community. Money for national health screening programs should preferably be directed more towards recruiting women for breast cancer screening, since breast cancer accounts for about 33% of all female cancers in Egypt ranking number one, while cervical cancer ranks number 13.
- Validation of novel biomarkers for early detection of radiation exposure
- Encouraging the use of all available new technologies, like mobile technology (mHealth), to strengthen the health system to address the growing threat of NCDs, as well as supporting parallel scientific research and evaluation to bring

the evidence of the success and cost effectiveness of the intervention.

Prevention of communicable diseases by:

- Primary prevention of Hepatitis C coupled with early detection and management by applying the simple risk assessment screening tool, which has been already developed and validated for Egyptians by testing themselves on www.virus-c.com.
- DNA testing for SEN virus for chronic hemodialysis patients who specifically have a history of previous blood transfusion and/or hepatitis infection.
- Intensifying efforts related to prevention of HIV in general, as well as prevention of mother to child transmission. Also noting the low antiretroviral therapy coverage, it is recommended to support scaling up of antiretroviral therapy coverage.

Reproductive health:

- Task-shifting (offering Post-abortion care at PHC facilities by using misoprostol instead of D&C) allows better use of valuable hospital resources and improves service acceptability, with an additional benefit of linking to family planning services.
- An in-depth understanding of the reasons underlying increased C-section rates in Egypt is needed. In the meantime, clear guidelines for when to use C-section should be developed and strictly enforced.
- Due to decline in usage of contraceptive methods and shifting to short term methods of family planning the health authorities need to take advantage of political commitment to family planning and strengthen the provided health services.
- Promoting breastfeeding through educational interventions and preparing specialists in the field, this is currently headed by the HIPH.

Environmental protection:

- Establishing a “national authority for climate change” for coordination between different ministries
- Including climate change scenarios in national strategic plans of water resources

- Locating agricultural land reclamation projects in the triangular area between El-Menia, El-Arish and El-Salloum governorates due to low water evaporation rates there
- Upgrading the efficiency of irrigation system (no flooding)
- Encouraging the use of LED lamps for power saving
- Reusing recovered material from end-of-life tires (crumb rubber) as recycled material in the manufacturing of new tires
- Encouraging Refuse Derived Fuel initiatives in cement factories.
- Trying to reach energy independence in Egypt through the use of solar and wind energy
- Reducing the discharge of desalination plants wastewater to the Red Sea and using it to construct sand drying beds.