The number of physicians in the population has increased significantly in the last two decades in the majority of Member States in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. There has also been a rapid increase, especially since 1990, in the number of medical schools, with private medical schools doubling in number since 2000. However, the improvement in densities has not kept up with the increase in population in a number of countries. At the same time, ensuring the quality and relevance of medical education remains a major challenge.

Several broader factors are shaping the context health professionals' education and practice, including the changing burden of disease, the fast growing privatization of health care, the increasing expectations of patients and communities, and political instability and conflict.

In response to this situation, WHO undertook a comprehensive review of undergraduate medical education in order to identify the challenges it faces in the Region, determine priorities and develop a framework for action. On the basis of the review's findings, the 62nd WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean adopted, in October 2015, resolution EM/RC62/R.4, including a regional framework for action on medical education.

The framework for action identifies strategic priorities and outlines short- and medium-term actions for countries and for WHO support towards reforming medical education. The resolution also requested that a high-level regional meeting be organized between ministers of health and ministers of higher education to achieve the higher level of coordination and collaboration necessary for the effective implementation of the regional framework. To this end, a high-level meeting is planned in late 2016.

In preparation for the planned ministerial meeting, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean organized an informal expert consultation meeting on health professionals' education. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- present the regional framework for action on medical education and get feedback on the appropriateness of the framework for the Region;
- agree on an initial draft of the agenda by identifying issues which need to be addressed in coordination with both ministries and propose solutions; and
 - propose and elaborate on the expected outcomes of the ministerial meeting.

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