Cairo, 14 March 2022 – The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab Board of Health Specializations have launched a 2-year regional Professional Diploma in Family Medicine.

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, and Dr Omar Al Rawas, Secretary General of the Arab Board of Health Specializations, inaugurated the launch virtually from the WHO Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt, on 28 February.

The Professional Diploma in Family Medicine is one of the fruits of a collaborative agreement between WHO and the Arab Board of Health Specializations to promote family practice in the Region as part of efforts to progress towards universal health coverage in the Arab world. The ambitious 5-year agreement, signed in 2021, aims to improve health system resilience in the Region by building future capacities in public health and community medicine, including strengthening postgraduate specialty training in family medicine.

“In addition to securing qualified family physicians, the Diploma will play a key role in upgrading the skills of thousands of existing general physicians who did not obtain formal postgraduate training and are currently providing health services using their basic medical education,” said Dr Al-Mandhari in his opening remarks.

A global shortage of family practitioners is posing significant challenges, including in the Region, in which only 700 family practitioners graduate each year against an estimated need for 21 000 practitioners. The Diploma is intended to help bridge this significant gap.

The Arab Board of Health Specializations endorsed the Diploma at a meeting of its Executive Board on 18 December 2021. The Arab Board of Health Specializations and WHO have expansive plans to implement the Diploma in most countries of the Region, starting with 12 countries that already have accredited family medicine training centres.

The Diploma was made possible through collaboration between WHO, the Arab Board of Health Specializations and several other partners, including the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), under the auspices of Accelerator 1 of the "Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All", a grouping of multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies to accelerate progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

During the event, His Excellency Professor Feras Ibrahim Hawari, Minister of Health of Jordan, His Excellency Dr Ahmed bin Mohamed bin Obaid Al Saidi, Minister of Health of Oman, and Her Excellency Dr Mai Alkaila, Minister of Health of Palestine, presented their countries' successful achievements in family practice.

In his closing remarks, Dr Awad Mataria, Director for Universal Health Coverage/Health Systems at the WHO Regional Office, emphasized the need to strengthen health systems in order to improve health security, as highlighted through the COVID-19 pandemic. “We are working to reshape our tools for health system strengthening whereby we would like to see countries invest in building resilient health systems that advance the dual goals of UHC and health security,” he said.

Representatives from the Arab Board of Health Specializations, ministers of health from countries of the Region, WHO representatives and experts from the WHO Regional Office all participated in the virtual launch.

The Diploma presents a perfect fit to the strategic priorities of regional "Vision 2023: Health for All by All" to expand UHC – especially in primary health care facilities – build public health capacities and strengthen partnerships.

For the more information on the diploma including registration details, visit: www.emro.who.int/rpdfm/register.html

Regional Professional Diploma in Family Medicine

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