Cairo, Kuwait, 14 December 2021-With a revived sense of urgency sparked by COVID-19 for innovative approaches to improve public health, WHO Country Office, in coordination with the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Kuwait, organised a course titled Health Leadership for Positive Change from 6 to 9 December 2021 targeting mid and senior level officials at ministries of health in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries.

While online sessions extended beyond the four days, the in-person component of the course was held at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialisations (KIMS) headquarters in Andalous. Faculty from all over the international community engaged with participants through lectures, discussions and interactive workshops -- jointly designed and delivered by the Johns Hopkins University, the UN System Staff College and WHO. The program also incorporated online exercises and in-class training to share knowledge and improve skills, including cross-cultural experiences and best practices.

It is important to note that leadership competencies are seldom part of public health or other specialized medical training programmes, which highlights the relevance of the course, as well as the need for continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to fill this gap.

As the objectives of the course included the advance of a new generation of public health leaders with technical, managerial, and cross functional skills, GCC young public health professionals with leadership potential were also encouraged to participate.

Among the course's expected achievements were heightened knowledge of the different leadership domains in public health, enhanced communication skills through exposure to examples and tools, improved ability to network with peers and coaches across disciplines and advocate for public health policy, and enriched leadership practices through lessons learned from the global COVID-19 crisis.

The sessions also underscored the leadership competencies required to decisively drive change to address the public health crisis of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which cost over 1.7 million lives annually in the Eastern Mediterranean Region alone as well as billions to economies. During the first day of the programme, Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, Manager, Infectious Hazard Prevention and Preparedness Unit, EMRO, highlighted leadership accomplishments and challenges during the pandemic. The second day's speakers agreed that successes and

failures of managing the pandemic brought great gains and incentives to the use of evidence in decision-making. The day ended with participants exploring principles of systems thinking by simulating a hectic night in a hospital emergency department with the game Friday Night at the ER.

With NCDs at the focus of the third day, case studies from around the globe and the Region were discussed and principles of effective communication were conveyed.

Dr. Peter Singer, Special Advisor to WHO Director-General, and Dr Awad Mataria, Director, Department of Health Systems, EMRO, explored innovations in health financing on the course's fourth day, which ended with a discussion around the differences between managers and leaders.

In addition, WHO Chief Scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan held a session on the "Role of WHO in Global Health Research" and shed light on the hierarchy of evidence and the importance of institutionalizing evidence in the policy process.

The dynamic programme, which explored a plethora of other pertinent topics such as "Leadership Styles and Tendencies", "Systems of Thinking in Practice", "Strategic Communication and Collaboration", "Health Diplomacy" and "Innovations in Public Health" concluded with a session on the "Role of WHO in Health Leadership" by Dr. Rana Hajjeh, Director, Programme Management, WHO, Eastern Mediterranean Region.

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