

12 October – The WHO country office in Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Directorate General for Health in Muscat Governorate, launched a joint virtual clinics project today to support the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) using remote technology, as part of the Partnership for Healthy Cities global network. Her Excellency Dr Fatma Al Ajmi, Undersecretary of Health Administration, Finance and Planning attended the event, with Dr Thamra Al Ghafri, Director General for Health of Muscat and a WHO country office technical team.

H.E. Dr Fatma Al Ajmi opened the event and acknowledged the efforts of all partners in launching the project stating, “I thank all teams for their relentless engagement that has contributed to the successful launch of this important initiative. We look forward to seeing its outcomes as well as expanding the rollout and having such virtual clinics across all the Sultanate’s governorates.”. The project has been implemented with support from WHO and the Partnership for Healthy Cities, which have worked closely with the Muscat Governorate to materialize the project in the best way possible. The Partnership, supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies in partnership with WHO and Vital Strategies, is a network of 70 cities committed to saving lives by preventing NCDs and injuries—and now supporting cities’ COVID-19 response as well.

The burden of NCDs is ever increasing, and like many other countries, Oman has witnessed a transition whereby NCDs constitute the main health burden. In Oman, chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and respiratory illnesses account for 71% of deaths within the 30-70 years age group.

Dr Jabbour, WHO Representative to Oman reiterated WHO’s intent to address health priorities in Oman, stating “WHO remains committed to supporting pioneering health projects, and will harness WHO knowledge, expertise and resources to support Oman in addressing the inevitably increasing burden of NCDs. We are sure that this Muscat Healthy City experience will constitute a “best practice” upon which to expand the experience nation-wide, as well as in other countries”.

The Virtual Clinics Service enables patients to receive medical care virtually/remotely, an intervention that will add new perspective to current primary health care services in Muscat. This is important not only to ensure continuity of high-quality service, but also for limiting the exposure risk to COVID-19 for both health workers and patients.

Dr Thamra Alghafri, Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat, added that “This project is an added value and an extra step towards a digitized system that will strengthen PHC in the Sultanate.”

Furthermore, the project will lay a foundation that will act as a core element to strengthen Oman’s preparedness to ensure service continuity in the face of any future pandemics that may occur.

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