



Dr Humayun Asghar 21 June 2023 – The vast machinery of the global polio eradication programme is much like the inner workings of a clock – a network of interconnected people, organizations and programmes that together are more powerful than the sum of their parts. Collaboration is foundational to eradication, and every eradicator plays a part in edging the programme closer to its goals.

But in some cases, individual eradicators develop capacities or practices that enable programmatic leaps. Dr Humayun Asghar is one of those outsize drivers of progress. His initiatives around early laboratory testing of stool samples of children with acute flaccid paralysis (AFP), his efforts to create a cross-regional network of laboratories, and his efforts to set up a large pioneering network of environmental surveillance sites in Egypt are innovations that today power the programme’s surveillance capacity. We know where the virus is, even in the absence of paralytic polio cases, largely thanks to his work.



The dawn of AFP surveillance in Pakistan



Advancing the Region's work



Supporting others to grow

Since he joined WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region in February 2002, Dr Humayun has served in several capacities – as Scientist Virologist, Regional Advisor for Public Health Laboratories, and finally as the Coordinator for the Region’s Poliovirus surveillance, Laboratory support and Data management. He credits 2 mentors in particular for inspiring his career – the late Dr Helmy Wahdan, former Polio Director for WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region, and Dr Olen Kew, a poliovirus scientist – and, over the course of his career, has tried to pay that inspiration forwards.

“Dr Humayun has mentored and supported young scientists and laboratory specialists across the Region to advance their skills and careers,” said Dr Nima Saeed Abid, WHO Representative for Sudan. “He has been a true leader in his field.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dr Humayun believes one of the keys to eradicating polio lies not in the laboratory, but in people: in empowering and engaging the workforce by incentivizing them with education, training and promotion.

On the occasion of his retirement in May 2023, Dr Humayun expressed gratitude that he was able to witness and contribute to two important milestones: the eradication of wild poliovirus types 2 and 3.

And when the eradication of WPV1 does happen, he says, “I will be cheering from the sidelines, alongside so many other vital contributors to the programme’s legacy.”



Nigeria, 2011. The first sample for polio environmental surveillance while training health workers,



Happy with happy faces. with the future of world - children, Nigeria, 2011



Observing team performance during Polio NID, Sharkia province, Egypt, 2003



Wednesday, 17 May 2024 07:38:44 AM, Quetta-Balochistan, Pakistan, 2006