

The 53rd Session of WHO's Regional Committee for Eastern Mediterranean concluded here in Isfahan today with a call for a strong commitment and joint endeavors for health development by the Member States. It noted with satisfaction the progress in the implementation of WHO's collaborative programmes and activities in the Region.

The Committee deliberated on several issues of importance to the countries and adopted resolutions on subjects of regional priority, including the following:

Consumption of Alcohol in the Region. The Regional Committee showed Concern at the growing number of reports from Member States referring to alarming signs of a

hidden epidemic in pockets of the young population in the Region with regard to hazardous consumption of alcohol. It urges Member States to Promote the conduct, in collaboration with WHO, nongovernmental organizations, medical

colleges and other academic institutions already working in this area, of well designed research and case studies to determine the magnitude, pattern and trend of alcohol consumption in the Region, and the impact for specific disease conditions and population groups.

The RC encouraged Member States to raise awareness of the potential for public health problems arising from alcohol consumption and the need to develop integrated strategies at national level to address the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including alcohol;

The R WHO Regional Director was requested to support Member States in formulating or

reformulating their national drug abuse policies to include alcohol-related problems;

And to advocate with Member States in favor of greater transparency regarding alcohol and other drug-related problems;

The Regional Strategy on preparedness and response for Human pandemic Influenza:

The committee Recognized the significance and impact of the current outbreaks of avian influenza, and the potential gravity of the anticipated human pandemic influenza;

And also recognized that the broadened purpose and scope of the International Health Regulations (2005) is a significant step towards protection of the international community against the potentially devastating consequences of public health emergencies such as pandemic influenza. Hence the committee endorsed the WHO Eastern Mediterranean strategic plan for avian influenza and human pandemic influenza.

It called upon Member States to:

establish a high-level stewardship and policy-making committee on avian influenza and human pandemic influenza comprising representatives from key ministries, and a technical committee comprising representatives from all sectors concerned, together with a Ministry of Health focal point to facilitate smooth communication with WHO;

The RC53rd Session requested the Regional Director to further support development of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Network for Outbreak Alert and Response to ensure prompt response to and containment of outbreaks of communicable diseases within the Eastern Mediterranean Region; and to encourage and support development of vaccines and antiviral medicines in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

It asked him to further support and foster partnerships and resource mobilization among the main stakeholders in order to contribute to capacity-building in communicable disease surveillance and response;

The Regional Director was also requested to facilitate coordination with other international agencies and WHO collaborating centers in establishing and strengthening influenza surveillance in Member States;

Regional Strategy for knowledge management to support public health

The 53rd Session of the Regional Committee expressed Concern by the knowledge gap and the lack of ability to translate knowledge into action; nevertheless, it recognized the efforts of some Member States in developing strategies and policies for some aspects of knowledge management.

The committee endorsed the regional strategy for knowledge management to support public health,

And Urged Member States to conduct a situation analysis of information and knowledge management institutions including publishers, libraries, information centers, information networks, health on the internet, information

technology centers and media centers;

The WHO Regional Director was requested by the committee to promote and catalyze public-private partnerships in support of e-health activities in the Region

and to provide technical support to Member States to formulate their national policies, strategies and plans for knowledge management and sharing, knowledge generation, use of ICT for health, human resources, and knowledge translation;

The committee called upon the Regional Director to develop and sustain the Eastern Mediterranean Knowledge Network (EMRKN) in collaboration with Member States.

Medical devices and equipment in contemporary health care systems and services:

The committee, Recalling resolution EM/RC44/R.3 on appropriate health technologies;

Recognizing that medical devices equip health care providers with indispensable tools necessary to perform their functions effectively and efficiently;

And concerned at the number of regional problems related to medical device management, at a time when the regional market for medical equipment is growing;

urged Member States to collect and/or update information on medical devices and the processes for technology assessment, selection and management;

It requested the Regional Director to establish a regional advisory group on assessment, selection and management of medical devices with a view to developing a regional strategy; and asked him to develop guidelines on assessment, selection and use of medical devices and to promote norms and standards focusing on quality and cost effectiveness;

The role of government in health development: the regional committee acknowledged the importance of the role played by governments in health development and noted the dramatic changes and challenges facing the role of government in general and health development in particular; and the growing

concerns over equity in access to quality health care, increasing vulnerability and limited coverage by social protection; hence , the committee urged Member States to promote investment in health development as having important economic return, and advocate the

centrality of health in all social and economic development initiatives;

It encouraged them to continue to play their leadership role in health development in order to protect societal values of equity, solidarity and fairness in line with health for all policies and strategies which consider health as a human right and not as a market commodity;

And called upon Member States to protect the role of government in service delivery in order to secure access for the poor, vulnerable groups and rural and remote populations;

And to pay particular interest to improving working conditions for professionals working full time in government facilities.

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