

The Regional Planning Course on Refractive Errors and Low Vision will be conducted from 19-25 November 2007 in the Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO-EMRO), with the support of IMPACT-EMR, Al-Noor Foundation, Sight savers International, Hong Kong Society for the Blind, and the International Center for Eye care Education. The course is being organized jointly by the EMR IAPB Office, Global Refractive Errors Working Group and the IAPB Low Vision Programme Committee.

The course aims at building the capacity of the national programs in tackling the burden of visual impairment that caused by low vision and refractive errors.

As per the WHO global estimates, there are nearly 314 million persons suffer from visual impairment. Out of these persons, the cause for 153 million is refractive errors. Regionally, in the Eastern Mediterranean region, there are 36.3 million visually impaired persons including 16 million who suffer from it due to refractive errors.

However, 75 % of this visual impairment could be treated, cured or prevented by highly cost-effective means.

Refractive errors such as short or long sightedness are the greatest cause of avoidable visual impairment among children. Meantime, people over 40 to 45 years of age need access to eye

care and glasses to be able to read, work and carry out the close tasks needed for everyday life.

Furthermore, it is estimated that there are about 40–65 million people with low vision. The number of people with low vision will increase as a result of the ageing of the world's population, and age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy are increasingly important causes of low vision.

Low-vision services are not available in many countries, particularly developing countries, or are located only in major cities. It is estimated that less than 5% of people needing low-vision care have access to it, but there is considerable variation between regions and countries.

Without appropriate optical correction, millions of children are losing educational and self development opportunities and adults are excluded from productive working lives, with severe economic and social consequences. Individuals and families are frequently pushed into a cycle of deepening poverty because of their inability to see well.

Correcting refractive errors is so simple; however it has yet received little government or NGO's attention and has been easily overlooked. A pair of spectacles could bring the world into focus of a child! Low vision care will allow children with low vision to be integrated into regular schools rather than being separated away from their counterparts and taught in special schools for the blind.

The global strategy of VISION 2020 focuses on visual impairment as a major public health problem and addresses its main causes including refractive errors and low vision.

So far, 80 % countries drafted VISION 2020 plans within their national agenda for health and 42 % countries did implement V2020- related plans.

One of the issues for discussion within this course would be identifying the priorities and strategies for meeting the refractive error and low vision burden on a regional scope.

One of the outcomes should enable the participants to develop systems in their respective countries for the delivery of effective and affordable community eye care including affordable spectacles and low vision devices.

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