

Message from

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
on the occasion of
WORLD FAMILY DOCTOR DAY

Cairo, Egypt, 19 May 2021

It is with great pleasure that the World Health Organization (WHO) joins the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) and Member States in celebrating World Family Doctor Day.

Family medicine has long been recognized as the most effective approach to address individuals' health needs while keeping the person at the centre of service delivery – in normal and exceptional situations alike.

The health system response to COVID-19, especially during the first wave, tended to emphasize hospital care, with less awareness of the role that could be played by family physicians within primary health care (PHC). However, all three components of PHC – primary care and essential public health functions, empowered people and communities, and multisectoral policy and actions – can and should play an important role in infection prevention, early detection, management of mild COVID-19 cases, and maintaining essential health services.

The pandemic has caused massive disruption to essential health services, as well as claiming the lives of many people infected with COVID-19.. WHO and partners in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, including WONCA, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNHCR and UNICEF have been working tirelessly, to ensure that essential health services are maintained and that primary health care is fully integrated into the national COVID-19 response plans.

Together with our partners, we developed a fully automated online training package for primary care physicians on COVID-19. The training is already being used by 70 000 physicians from the Region and has been made available in 4 languages tailored for countries in our Region We aim to reach 150 000 registrations by the end of 2021. I take this opportunity to encourage


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doctors working in the public and private health sectors to take advantage of this free-of-charge course <https://covid.emro.who.int>.

I am also pleased to announce that we recently signed an agreement with the Arab Board of Health Specializations to support our efforts to establish a Professional Diploma in Family Medicine in the Region. The Diploma aims to address the huge shortage of family physicians in the Region by introducing general practitioners to the family practice approach. Currently five countries have completed training-of-trainers workshops and I hope that more countries will join in the near future.

Together with our partners in the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, we are establishing on a regional initiative to identify country models of care. The initiative complements national efforts to develop universal health coverage priority benefits packages, building on the findings of WHO's Primary Health Care Measurement and Improvement initiative.

Today, as we celebrate the contribution made by family doctors around the world, we should view the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to expand and improve health services for the long term. The pandemic response has once again shown the value of collaboration and coordination. If we all work together, we can build stronger, more resilient health systems and achieve our regional vision of "Health for All, by All".