



**Message from**  
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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**  
**on the occasion of**  
**WORLD FAMILY DOCTOR DAY**  
**19 May 2015**

It is with great pleasure the World Health Organization (WHO) joins the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) and Member States in celebrating World Family Doctor Day. I would like to take the opportunity to underscore the importance of family practice programmes for delivering quality primary health care and accelerating progress towards universal health coverage in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Universal health coverage is a strategic goal to which all Member States of the Region have expressed their commitment. Through the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, Ministers of Health, in 2014, endorsed a regional framework for action for advancing universal health coverage in the Region. The Committee also called on Member States to develop and implement a road map for universal health coverage based on the regional framework. Ensuring access to an essential package of quality health services through a family practice approach is a critical element of the framework.

There is a growing consensus that universal health coverage should be prominent in the post-2015 development agenda currently being set by the United Nations. At the same time, there have been some concerns that the service delivery dimension of universal health coverage has not received adequate attention. Family practice can address those concerns.

Last year, and in collaboration with WONCA, the Regional Office launched an initiative to raise awareness and develop evidence-based information on family practice in the Region. A situation analysis was conducted to assess the status of family practice in countries. Some countries have reasonably functioning family practice programmes. Some have committed to such programmes but are still struggling to scale up their implementation across the country. Other countries may have some way to go before they can establish family practice programmes. However, all countries face challenges in implementing family practice. There are some concerns, for instance, about whether countries have the appropriate workforce,

comprising trained teams of family physicians and nurses, or even a strategy for producing such a skilled workforce to implement a family practice programme.

WHO has recently undertaken an assessment of the family medicine education and training capacity in the Region. The results show that the lack of family medicine departments in medical schools is limiting the exposure of medical students to this specialty. A significant need has been identified to establish family medicine departments in all medical schools, in order to expose and sensitize students to this field. Inadequate training capacity, low salaries and lack of career development opportunities mean that family medicine is not fully supported as a medical specialty and thus makes it less attractive to graduates compared to other specialties.

WHO is working on an agenda to support family practice in the Region.

- It is developing short-term training courses that include a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical skills based on global best practices. The courses are a collaborative effort with academic institutions in the Region and will improve knowledge and skills for physicians working in primary care facilities. The training will have an online component along with elements of face-to-face training that physicians can readily participate in.
- An operational guide for implementing family practice elements is in development and will provide a step-by-step approach to establishing family practice programmes in countries.

Let me take this opportunity to reaffirm WHO's commitment to providing continuing technical support to its Member States in adopting a strategic approach, standards and elements for the implementation of family practice.