Summary report on the

Regional training workshop to
develop capacity in the introduction
and dissemination of WHO new
growth curves in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region

Cairo Egypt
20 February–1 March 2007
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1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) organized a regional training workshop to develop regional capacity in the introduction and dissemination of the WHO new growth curves at the Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt, from 20 February to 1 March 2007. The objectives of the training workshop were to:

- train a core group of facilitators on child growth assessment;
- conduct the first end-users training workshop on the use and interpretation of the new growth curves for national representatives from member countries.

The workshop was attended by health policy-makers, professors and health professionals from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. It was also attended by representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and staff from the WHO Regional Office and headquarters.

Dr Haifa Madi, Director, Division of Health Protection and Promotion, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, inaugurated the workshop and delivered the message of Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his message, Dr Gezairy noted that the multi-centre growth reference study (MGRS) had been initiated in response to the recommendation of the World Health Assembly to develop a new
international reference for the growth and development of infant and young children. By replacing the current international growth references, which are based on children from a single country, with a set based on an international group of children from six distinct sites, one can determine how growth can proceed amidst diversity and variations among population groups.

After successful completion of the MGRS project, WHO had immediately begun to work on the development of a training course to effectively introduce the use and interpretation of the WHO new growth curves in member countries. Dr Gezairyy concluded by emphasizing that an effective introduction to the new growth curves was not an easy task as it required extensive collaboration with a large category of partners and required the training of many public health personnel.

2. CONCLUSIONS

The training course used a variety of instructional methods, including reading, written exercises, discussion, role play, demonstrations and practical training sessions on taking anthropometric measurements of children. The training materials consisted of four modules, a photo booklet, answer sheets, a facilitator’s guide, WHO child age calculator, boys’ and girls’ growth records, an anthropometry training video and two job aids which summarized the steps involved in weighing and measuring a child's length and height, and the steps which should be followed to investigate the causes of under-nutrition and over-nutrition.

The training modules emphasize that growth assessment efforts must be accompanied by an appropriate response to growth problems discovered. The modules cover a range of topics from:
describing the significance of the WHO child growth standards; explaining how to start a child’s growth record; explaining how to determine age, weigh a child and record and measure weight, height and body mass index (BMI); showing how to plot points for growth indicators on line graphs; explaining how to identify normal growth and growth problems and interpreting trends on growth charts; describing how to interview and counsel a mother after her child’s growth assessment; giving appropriate feeding recommendations; conducting interviews to investigate the causes of under-nutrition and over-nutrition and giving advice regarding the specific causes of each.

An open discussion highlighted and discussed technical issues in relation to the MGRS, the differences between the new and previous standards and the procedures to be taken during the establishment of countries’ growth charts.

Participants reported the need to assess and analysis the current situation of growth monitoring in each country and to reanalyse the existing growth-monitoring data according to the new growth standards.

They cited awareness and advocacy for decision-makers, stakeholders involved in growth monitoring, academic institutions, UN agencies and donors, paediatric associations and nutrition societies, as two important components to strengthen the adaptation of the new growth standards and felt that this could be achieved through conducting a workshop. It was suggested that nutrition departments at ministries of health should contact WHO/UNICEF country offices to support the implementation of the new growth curves and it was recommended that WHO, as a technical body, should take a lead role in providing support to each country in
conducting national advocacy efforts and in developing a strategy for the rolling out and implementation of the new growth standards.

The need for human resources, equipment and training to be able to successfully disseminate knowledge of the new growth standards was identified, and WHO was requested to assist countries in seeking the financial support needed during the implementation phase of the new standards.

The regional training workshop provided an opportunity to introduce the new growth standards to representatives of member countries. All topics included in the training programme were successfully completed and some modifications were incorporated depending upon the request of participants and course organizers. A core group of regional facilitators were well trained and prepared for future collaboration on further dissemination of the new growth standards. The end-user training workshop was attended by national representatives from the Region, in addition to a representative from Algeria. The participants demonstrated strong interest and involvement throughout the period of training. Training was also provided to participants on navigating and using the training course website and references were provided on available publications on the MGRS.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. When sufficient funds become available, subregional training workshops on the WHO new growth curves should be organized by WHO Regional Office providing that national authorities show relevant interest.
2. WHO and other UN agencies should provide financial and technical support during the implementation phase of the new growth standards.

3. The training modules should be translated into Arabic and French. Universities and other relevant institutions should be involved in the translation of the modules and in conducting the training.