

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

**JOINT MEETING OF CHIEF NURSING OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF
THE REGIONAL ADVISORY PANEL ON NURSING IN THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 22–25 March 1997

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Joint Meeting of Chief Nursing Officers and Members of the Regional Advisory Panel on Nursing in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to His Excellency, Dr Mohamed Eyad Chatty, the Minister of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic, for kindly accepting to host this meeting and for honouring us with his presence.

As we all know, rapid social and economic changes, which have been experienced in almost every country in the world, have their impact on both the health status of the people

and health systems themselves. Shifts in the demographic picture, increased levels of education, modern means of communication, increased dependence on technology, inflation and unemployment are only few examples of these changes. Thus it is no surprise to see in this Region that while those under 15 years of age constitute a large segment of the population in a given country, the aging population is also on the increase. In response to such demographic changes Member States are developing policies and programmes to address the welfare of the elderly; the role of nursing is changing accordingly.

I am pleased to note that ministries of health have been taking various measures to look at the impact of various changes on health status and are adopting strategies that will ensure health for all. In some Member States health sector reforms have been initiated, and I anticipate that more reform will be seen as we approach the next century. A major challenge in the process of any health system reform deals with human resources, their training, performance, accountability, and so on.

In this region, one aspect of concern to policy-makers is the quantity and quality of nurses—vital members of any health team. The World Health Organization has since its inception taken the lead in supporting Member States to institutionalize education of nurses and improve the delivery of nursing services. In this Region, nursing schools and education for nurses at university level have been established to educate technical and professional nurses. Consultants have been appointed, fellowships have been awarded to train teaching staff and various teaching learning materials have been provided to support educational programmes.

Dear Colleagues,

As we approach the 21st century, more attention needs to be given to the quality and cost-effectiveness of nursing services and nursing education. In this context, I am pleased to inform you that a regional strategy for nursing development has been finalized to provide Member States with guidelines for future action. Regional standards and future direction for basic and post-basic nursing education were also proposed during 1995 by the Regional Advisory Panel. Furthermore, model prototype curricula have been developed as well as five nursing textbooks in various areas of specialization, which were prepared in Arabic. In addition, a manual for training nursing managers is also being finalized. While we can take

pride in our achievements, we are fully cognizant of the enormous task that still lies ahead of us. Member States need to develop national plans of action for nursing to address issues like institutionalizing system for quality of nursing improvements, increasing managerial and leadership capabilities of nursing personnel, promoting delivery of nursing care based on research evidence, establishing system for continuing education for nursing personnel and strengthening the regulatory mechanism controlling nursing practice and nursing education.

As chief nurses and nursing leaders in this Region, you are faced with the challenge of leading the nursing workforce and developing these national plans. This is indeed an enormous endeavour.

It is for this reason that the Regional Committee at its Forty-first Session discussed the need for planning for nursing and midwifery development in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and adopted a Regional Resolution urging Member States to establish and strengthen nursing units in ministries of health to enable them to undertake a leading role in the development of nursing and midwifery services. Moreover, the resolution called on Member States to give high priority to the development of plans aimed at improving the quality of nursing and midwifery services and meeting the health needs of the people.

Similarly, the World Health Assembly in its Forty-ninth Session passed a resolution on strengthening nursing and midwifery. In this resolution, the Director-General was requested to increase support to countries where appropriate in the development, implementation and evaluation of national plans for health development, including nursing and midwifery. It is for these reasons that the agenda of this meeting is organized around the concept of strategic planning and the skills required by chief nurses to implement national action plans for nursing development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During your discussions, you will address priority areas that need to be strengthened. I urge you, in your deliberations, to maintain a balance between professional upgrading of the nursing workforce and the realities and health needs of the people, particularly the vulnerable groups, such as women, children and poorer segments of the population. Furthermore, you must stress the role of nurses in promoting health and preventing illness and defining action that needs to be taken to expand nursing services beyond the walls of the hospitals, into the community and people's homes. Finally, I hope that you look critically at your current role as chief nursing officers and analyse the potential and limitations of this post and define relevant strategies required for mobilizing the nursing workforce in the health system to play a major role in health policy formulation and health sector reform.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that our main goal is to enhance the quality of nursing services through development of national plans, that address the realities and needs of Member States and would like to assure you of WHO assistance and support in addressing these issues.

I look forward to receiving the outcome of your deliberations and your recommendations. I hope that your stay in the historic city of Damascus will be both productive and enjoyable.