

BIRTH OF EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EDITORS (EMAME)

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The birth of Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) was announced on the concluding day of the 2nd WHO EMERO Regional Conference on Medical Journals held at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from October 10-12th 2004. This conference was organized by Saudi Medical Journal(SMJ), The World Health Organization Regional Office of the Eastern Mediterranean(WHO EMRO) and King Abdulaziz City for Science & Technology(KACST) in collaboration with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(ISESCO). The major objective of EMAME is to help improve the standard of medical journalism in the EMERO region besides providing a platform for discussion and interaction between the medical editors in this region. EMAME will work in close liaison with the WHO EMRO. Formation of EMAME is a welcome step in the right direction which in fact should have been taken many years ago.

The idea to form EMAME was conceived during the deliberations at the First WHO Regional Conference on Medical Journals held at Cairo in October 2003 wherein a Task Force headed by Dr. Basim Yaqub was formed for this purpose.¹ Other members of this taskforce included Dr. Ahmad Jamal from Bahrain, Dr. Farhad Handjani from Iran, Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary from Pakistan, Ms. Jane Nicholson from WHO EMRO, Dr. Ahmad S. El-Morsy from Egypt and Dr. Yousif Kordofani from Sudan. Members of the Taskforce had extensive communication and exchange of ideas between

themselves. A draft of the provisional constitution was also circulated among them for further discussion. EMAME would not have seen the light of the day had it not been due to the valuable patronage; help and assistance of Dr. Najeeb Al-Shorbaji from the WHO EMRO offices. Others who played a vital role in its formation included Ms Jane Nicholson, Dr. Basim Yaqub, Dr. Ahmad Jamal, Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary and Ms Susan Douglas from Saudi Medical Journal besides other members of the Taskforce. We are indeed pleased at the fact that we had some input in its birth as our Chief Editor and Chairman of the Editorial Board Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary who represented Pakistan in the Taskforce did make some valuable contributions in its formative stages.

Members of the Taskforce once again met on October 10th, 2004 at Riyadh for formal discussions on the draft constitution. Dr. Najeeb Al-Shorbaji from WHO EMRO, Dr. Bruce Squires and Dr. Farrokh Habibzadeh from World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) Dr. James Tumwine from Federation of African Medical Editors (FAME) and Dr. Andrew Herxheimer from the Cochrane Collaboration were also invited to this meeting. The participants discussed the experience of WAME and FAME and succeeded in taking the following unanimous decisions which were presented by Dr. Basim Yaqub Chairman of the Taskforce in the concluding session of the conference on October 12th for approval:-

1. Finalizing the essence of constitution, it was unanimously approved. The constitution will be made available shortly to all the members.
2. EMAME will be a part of a network of

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WHO EMRO with all the support and collaboration available.

3. It was decided that the existing taskforce will act as interim Executive Council until the next conference with the following objectives:-
 - Increase and widen the number of members. All the editors attending the First or the Second conference will be founding members of the Association. The Executive Council will strive to increase the membership.
 - Explore the issue of education and training through courses and workshops held in different countries of the region in collaboration with WHO EMRO and the possibility of developing regional courses.
 - Establish a website for EMAME and continue the current listserv and encourage further discussion through listserv.
 - Continuation of the existing objectives of the association.
 - Maintain collaboration between EMAME and other similar associations especially WAME and FAME.
 - Plan for a meeting of the General Assembly of EMAME at the next regional conference and hold election of the Executive Council.

The city of Shiraz in Islamic Republic of Iran was selected as the next venue of the conference to be held within two years. Dr. Farhad Handjani was entrusted with the responsibility to finalize the exact dates and the venue.

Interim Executive Council

The interim Executive Council members and their responsibilities will be as under:-

President

Dr. Basim Yaqub, SMJ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Vice President:

Dr. Ahmed Jamal from Bahrain

Secretary General/Treasurer:

Dr. Farhad Handjani from Islamic Republic of Iran

Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary from Pakistan, Dr. Ahmed El-Morsy from Egypt, Dr. Yusif Kordofani from Sudan and Ms Jane Nicholson from WHO EMRO will be the other members of the Executive Council while Ms Susan Douglas from Saudi Medical Journal will act as the Administrative Secretary.

Dr. Najeeb Al-Shorbaji and Dr. Farrokh Habibzadeh will be the advisors to the interim Executive Council.

All the decisions of the Taskforce were unanimously approved by the members present. Dr. Bruce Squires from WAME was honoured to be the first Honorary Member of EMAME which he gladly accepted.

Active Membership: Editors and previous editors of peer reviewed medical journals in the EMRO region will be eligible for regular active membership. The Editors will include Editor-in-Chief, Deputy, Associate, Assistant, Supplement and Managing Editors. Membership will require completion of legible application Form which will be made available shortly. The tenure of the Executive Council is also proposed to be for two years. The leadership of the Association shall preferably be selected from editors or previous editors only. As per the essence of the constitution under discussion, active members can vote, hold office and serve on committees. Others like Technical Editors etc. can become associate members. There is a provision for honorary membership as well wherein they will be nominated by two active members with justification and will have to be approved by the Executive Council. There will be no membership fee.

Executive Council

The leadership of the Association shall be vested in the Executive Council, which shall consist of 1) President, 2) President Elect, 3) Past President, 4) General Secretary/Treasurer, 5) 3 Vice-Presidents and 6) 4 Vice-President at large. The Executive Council it is hoped will be geographically diverse.

Experience of WAME & FAME

World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) was formed in 1995 and it has 1137 members from 711 journals representing 78

countries.² WAME was fortunate that some of the reputed journals who were the founding members gave generous donation so as to run and manage its affairs efficiently. Not only that JAMA offered and is running its website.³ FAME was provided financial assistance by the WHO Geneva.^{4,5} Ever since its inception WAME has done a commendable job. It has prepared a Syllabus for prospective and newly appointed Editors which gives details about the responsibilities of Editors, what the Editors should know before accepting such responsibilities, the Editorial Process, Editorial contents, publication policies, manuscript evaluation, peer review system, decision making and communicating with Authors etc.⁶ It has a List serve and offers opportunities for discussion to its members on many important issues including problems faced by the editors through electronic discussion. However the problems faced by the Editors in the EMRO Region are to some extent different. That is why the formation of EMAME will be welcomed by the Editors from this region. Now it is up to the EMAME interim Executive Council to come up to the high expectations that all of us have. WHO EMRO which played a vital role in the formation of EMAME, it is hoped will provide the initial financial assistance but later on it will be up to the Executive Council to generate finances to ensure its efficient functioning.

Formation of Education, Ethics Committees

The EMAME Executive will have to form different committees to strengthen collaboration to improve the biomedical journals in the EMRO region. Some other important tasks which it will have to accomplish as highlighted in the conference recommendations will include developing regional guidelines for editors, developing regional education and training courses and developing mechanism to enhance the exchange of information. Developing its own Website and a list serve for communication amongst the editors in the region should be taken up on urgent basis. Great care should be taken while constituting various Committees upholding merit with due credit

to experience so that only such people are selected who are willing, have time and can deliver. This is of utmost importance if EMAME has to become a functional body.

Publication of a Directory of all the members with their e-mail address should be on priority. A sincere effort should be made to identify the problems facing the Editors of the Journals in the region and finding ways and means to solve them as far as possible. Economic viability of most of the journals published in the region is a serious problem which should also be of concern to the interim Executive Council. EMAME will also be expected to provide peers to Editors of small journals. And finally it must find out how Islamic Ethics can be helpful in publication and medical research. The discussion in the EMAME must be relevant to the Editors of this region. While a regular meeting of the EMAME may be possible only once every two years, the member countries in the region can explore the possibilities of developing joint education and training programme for the editors amongst themselves may be at a small scale to begin with. For example Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran can have a very fruitful collaboration holding training workshops for Editors as well as Peer Review System in Pakistan and Iran. Similarly other countries can also have joint ventures on modest scale to begin with. There is no dearth of talent within the region but it must be properly exploited by making available opportunities.

Problems with Indexation

Indexation of medical journals at major electronic databases like Medline remains a very sour point with many medical journals published from the EMRO region which are not yet covered by MEDLINE. It is heartening to note that WHO EMRO has stated publishing WHO Index Medicus which covers most of the medical journals published from the region. It is also available on CDs as ExtraMed. Dr. Najeeb Al-Shorbaji rightly feels that writers and investigators in this region must give more importance to the Regional Indexes like ExtraMed, WHO Index Medicus as they cover

the disease pattern seen in this region which may not be of interest to researchers and writers in the developed world. His efforts to get WHO Index Medicus, ExtraMed linked to the MEDLINE, one hope will bear fruits and if and when that is accomplished, this huge source of data from this region will also become available to researchers and medical writers all over the world.⁷ In the meantime, the recommendation by the conference that all medical journals from this region should strive to have Online Editions with free access will go a long way in improving the visibility of these journals attracting a much wider readership. Our own experience shows that ever since we launched our Online Edition of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences (pjms.com.pk), we have witnessed a 300% increase in the number of manuscripts being received from overseas. This provides an opportunity to be selective and choosy considering only the best and quality manuscripts for publication. Thus it helps in improving the standard and quality of the journals.

We sincerely hope that by the time we meet next at Shiraz, EMAME will have become fully functional and its interim Executive Council will have something to present as its initial accomplishments.

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