

PHC IN ACTION

Official Newsletter of Primary Health Care Department at the
Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon

EFFECTIVE VACCINE MANAGEMENT TRAINING



The Primary Health Care heroes at the EVM training

In view of the national decline of the vaccination rate in Lebanon, the Primary Healthcare Department (PHC), with the support of UNICEF, held an Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) assessment and training. The EVM training aimed to address the gaps that were identified during the assessment and to increase the number of vaccinated children all over the Lebanese territory. The training was provided to District vaccine distribution centers physicians and staff, PHCCs and dispensary nurses, Private sector physicians enrolled in the collaboration initiative with the Lebanese Pediatrics Society (LPS), UNHCR, and border vaccination sites teams, and UNRWA clinics physicians and nurses. All of the recruited trainers had a strong health background and a vast field experience in immunization. The modules covered vaccine-preventable diseases and vaccines, cold chain equipment and monitoring devices, managing immunization sessions (pre-vaccination assessment, safe injection practices, effective patient education and communication, adverse event management, and reporting), and community outreach and defaulter tracking. In addition to the topics mentioned above, the District physicians' module included two extra topics, microplanning to reach every community and the electronic information system in vaccine stock management, reporting on vaccination services, defaulter tracking, and Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) reporting. The MoPH and partners are initiating interventions to increase the demand for immunization services and coupling it with an appropriate supply of high-quality services to ensure that all children residing in Lebanon have access to effective and high-quality vaccines.

Fighting the COVID-19 Infodemic



Knowing that the "infodemic" might be more of a pandemic than the COVID-19 virus (Patel et al., 2020), the primary healthcare department convened awareness sessions about this topic. A PHCC in Katermaya, under the supervision of and with coordination with the municipalities of Iqlim Al Kharroub villages, conducted outreach activities to raise awareness and tackle misconceptions around the COVID-19 vaccine. Field visits were conducted by PHCC staff and educational materials were distributed to encourage and guide residents to register on the MoPH COVID-19 Vaccine platform. In addition to that, numerous physicians supported the initiative by carrying out awareness lectures and radio interviews to discuss, clarify the misinformation and misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Patel, M. P., Kute, V. B., Agarwal, S. K., & COVID-19 Working Group of Indian Society of Nephrology (2020). "Infodemic" COVID 19: More Pandemic than the Virus. Indian journal of nephrology, 30(3), 188–191. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijn.IJN_216_20

Training Workshops on PHC Quality and Accreditation Standards

The Primary Health Care Department with the support of its partners, carried out three days capacity building training sessions on the PHC quality and accreditation standards. Number of attendees were 128 workers from supporting international NGOs namely International Medical Corps and Premiere Urgence Internationale. The main aim of this activity was to enhance implementation of the PHC accreditation standards in Primary Healthcare facilities to improve the quality of service delivered to the beneficiaries.

Malnutrition Alert

Eight malnutrition cases among pregnant and lactating women were diagnosed at one of the primary health care screening centers in a one month period of time! This number is alarming and is expected in light of the current poor socio-economic situation that the country is passing through. Acute malnutrition can have drastic impacts on the health and the well being on the mothers and their babies. Pregnant or Lactating Women (PLW) with acute malnutrition increase the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes, including obstructed labor, premature or low-birth-weight (LBW) babies and postpartum hemorrhage. LBW and poor health and nutritional outcomes later in life. It is important to ensure that routine screening, referrals, and follow up are carried out with all diagnosed cases of children under five and PLW. It is essential, especially during this time of crises, to treat and prevent exacerbation in the national Global acute malnutrition rate.



Tleil- Akkar Explosion and the rapid response of PHCCs

It is unfortunate to report yet another deadly explosion in Lebanon shortly following the doomed one year memorial of the Beirut Port Explosion. This time around residents of Tleil, a town in Akkar, were the victims of hoarding of hundreds of fuel tanks in a backyard which mysteriously caught fire and yielded one of the deadliest explosion killing more than 20 individuals and severely wounding more than 80. It is well known that burn victims necessitate urgent and immediate care as the timeliness of the latter yields a better prognosis in an unfortunate event. At that time, all healthcare workers from the region, whether from hospitals, red cross ambulances or PHCCs rushed to the explosion site to cater to the needs of the wounded, and make sure they receive the appropriate first aid measures until safe transportation measures were adopted to finally transfer them to a specialized burn unit, namely Geitaoui Hospital in Beirut. The role of PHCCs was of utmost importance in this emergent situation, where a mobile unit was mobilized on the day of by Irshad PHCC to rapidly respond to the unfortunate event and on the other hand, Healthcare workers from facilities like Salamtak, Al Beera, Al Tanmeyah and CMC PHCC conducted regular home visits to attend to the wounded. ***It is yet again unfortunate that in Lebanon, it is only in times of misery and misfortune that the role and impact of having a strong body of healthcare workers at the Primary Healthcare level is manifested.***



No good deed goes unpunished

During a PHCC field visit in Akkar, 90-year-old "Hajji Im Samir" was introduced as the woman who sold her land in a "Talhyat Sahel Akkar" to build a PHCC to serve her community. This is a story of how one good deed, on a personal and individual level, can heal and serve a community. As it is said: It takes a village!

Increasing Uptake of COVID-19 Vaccine in Akkar

Akkar is known to be one of the largest and most underprivileged and underserved areas in Lebanon coming in third place as the most deprived Qadaa in the country (UNDP,n.d.). As Akkar lies on the borders of a conflicted state, it has always been the victim of turbulence and unrest. However, the population residing in Akkar have always found ways to cope with the situation, stand their grounds and used availed resources. But one cannot ignore the unavailability of equipped tertiary care facilities, rendering the access to healthcare services suboptimal in this area, specially during the multi faceted crisis Lebanon is going through whether economic or health (COVID-19). This is specially visualized in the vaccination rate against COVID-19, with Akkar being one of the least vaccinated districts. Accordingly, the MOPH sought out to launch a vaccination campaign “**تَعْرِف، تسجل، تطعم، لا ينفع الندم**” in collaboration with NGOs. INGOs (IOM AND IOCC), and Pzifer that relied on mobile units and PHCCs to facilitate the vaccination individuals against COVID-19 at their doorsteps. The campaign was launched in Akkar on September the 27th ,2021 and the preliminary results have indicated a new milestone in raising awareness levels in regards to COVID-19 and subsequent vaccination rates, nudging policy and decision makers at the MoPH level to maintain this activity until complete vaccination of Akkar.

Trying to Maintain the Progress and Sustain the System: PHC in crisis

Challenges	Mitigation efforts	Effects
Fuel shortages and power cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Partnered with UNICEF to provide UPSs and solar fridges to PHCCs. o Assessed with partners the possibility of applying solar systems at PHC settings. o Coordinated with WHO in providing fuel donations to PHCCs so they can function again. o Partnered with several iNGOs to fully cover transportation fees to assure the continuity of the acute malnutrition treatment program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Vaccines and insulin supplies were properly preserved. o Environment-friendly setting at PHCCs. o Decline in power shortage hours. o Beneficiaries diagnosed with malnutrition followed up on their treatment until full recovery.
High vaccination dropout rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Partnered with IOCC and several iNGOs to conduct community outreach activities that refer vaccination dropouts to the nearest PHCCs. o Provided trainings to all PHCCs and dispensaries on the importance of vaccination and reviewed its protocols with the staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The vaccination rates started to increase in the final quarter of 2021. o Dropout rates are beginning to decrease. o Newly recruited staff members are now equipped to apply vaccination protocols.
Migration of PHC providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provided trainings and capacity building opportunities for staff members. o Presented a Family medicine programs to retain physicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The feedback attained post the trainings showed that staff members were more motivated and hopeful especially after face-to-face trainings.

Lebanon has always been a victim of troubled and conflicted times but since 2019, it was the first time its healthcare sector is shaken to its core. Shortages in basic needs such as fuel, gas, medical supplies, drugs, healthcare workers negatively impacted the quality and quantity of services provided at the PHC level. However, the Primary healthcare department at the MoPH alongside its partners in the PHC setting managed to establish several mitigation strategies to maintain the progress that has been done throughout the year and try to sustain the National Network, keeping in mind the quality of care and life of its beneficiaries.



MUST READ

Importance of financing PHCCs

Primary Healthcare is the cornerstone of Healthcare systems in general, being the first point of entry and gatekeeper. It is in dire times that main actors of PHC play a leading role in standing by the community and maintaining the health of the people. However, in Lebanon, government policies tend to overlook the need to properly support the primary healthcare system as the focus turns to the profit generating, private sector, namely private hospitals. Subsequently, the National PHC Network has survived to this point in time with the support of international and national NGOs in addition to the in kind contribution of the MOPH regarding medications and vaccines. However, the current situation jeopardizes the standing status of these facilities vis a vis the deterioration of the currency and subsequently the disruption in the supply chain and motivation of healthcare workers, which feeds into the inevitable brain drain. As if these barriers weren't enough of a challenge on the network, the added responsibility to alleviate the burden on other levels of care places PHC at a sensitive and turning point, where it has no other option but to stand up to the challenge, maintain the progress done while gearing up for the near future bearing in mind the end users. That can only be done if policymakers reinforce their standing and highlight the importance of scaling up the national governmental budget on PHC to better equip the network to a long battle against fragility and collapse. In conclusion, financing primary healthcare is no longer a demand, it is a crucial need.