

Editorial**Promoting Health Research in Bahrain as an Asset Not a Cost**

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Challenges facing health research in the Kingdom of Bahrain are numerous; there are logistics and attitudes issues that hinder research activities. The indifferent attitude towards health research reflects limited understanding of the critical role of research in strengthening health care and improving the health status of the population. Health research is essential, not only for patient's care but also to form strategies and guide policies related to health care systems.

Health research, especially experimental prospective randomized controlled trials are fundamental in evidence based medicine and innovative health solutions. Furthermore, most current research is retrospective, which is not necessarily related to major health concern in the country. Therefore setting health research priorities is paramount to guide researchers and funding agencies.

So far, there are very limited basic research infrastructures. To bridge the gap between good wishes and practical response to researchers needs, there is an obligation to place strong and essential physical and human resources in major health institutions.

Most research in health institutions in Bahrain is conducted in the Government and BDF hospitals and health centers. Private sector contribution is limited. In the vast majority of developed countries, most resources and funding for health research is from private sectors, but in developing countries most funding is from the governments and the public sectors.

According to the global perspective on research and development published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics October 2009, the distribution of researchers in the world by main regions/countries in 2007 revealed that the Arab states in Africa represented 1.4% and the Arab states in Asia represented only 0.3% of the world researchers. It also revealed gender disparity; female in the Asian Arab states represented only 21% of the researchers.

What about the investment in research and development? The triad countries of the European Union, the United States and Japan represented almost 70% of global R & D expenditure, while the Arab states in Africa spent 0.3% and the Arab states in Asia spent 0.1% of global R & D expenditure. The latter came in the bottom of the world list. While Israel of 4.7% was at the top of the world list.

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Efforts for capacity building of researchers are currently conducted by the two main medical schools, AGU and RCSI, two medical journals, BMB and JBMS and other academic health institutions. However, capacity building for research still has a long way to go and more investments and concerted efforts are needed to push it forward.

Research utilization and dissemination is another challenge. The two main forums for disseminating research in Bahrain are Bahrain Medical Bulletin and the Journal of Bahrain Medical Society. Both depend on volunteers, limited financial and human resources. This threatens their sustainability and is a real threat to their mere survival.

On a positive note, Bahrain led the way in the Cochrane review in the Arab countries and Iran. Furthermore, according to a recent report, there were 42 Cochrane reviews per million population in Bahrain. This was only out performed by New Zealand.

Networking and collaboration, national, regional and international, is fundamental for health research progress and advancement. BMB and JBMS need to have more collaboration and coordination. Public and private sectors support is essential for the sustainability of both journals. The Academic institutions; the medical schools at the AGU and RCSI and CHS need to have a more active roles in supporting BMB and JBMS.

Bahrain Medical Bulletin has just celebrated its 30th anniversary; ninety percent of the research published in BMB is Bahraini produced research. In addition, most of that research is done without any funding support, which makes the process is even more challenging.

On a good note however, one of the aspirations of the Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain is that “all Bahraini nationals and residents have access to quality healthcare.” In addition, “Bahrain will be a leading center for modern medicine.” The National economic strategy of 2009-2014, which is the plan of action for the Economic Vision 2030, affirms that by the year 2014, 10% of all public funding for universities is directly allocated to world-standard research. This is without any doubt, when implemented, would have a paramount effect on the advancement of research in the country.

This is a vision that truly views research in the Kingdom of Bahrain as an Asset and not a Cost. In addition, it is with a pleasure that we take this occasion to announce the establishment of Dr. Ali Al-Khalifa Research Fund (AARF). AARF is an agency for supporting medical research in Kingdom of Bahrain. The aim is to lead the way toward health research that improves people's health and quality of life. AARF established and funded by the family of Dr. Ali Al-Khalifa.