

Minutes of Health Working Group Meeting - North

Date: Thursday 11/Feb /2021

Venue: Tripoli UNHCR Office (Webex)



Summary of Discussions and Action Points:

1. Follow-up on action points from last meeting (Farah – UNHCR)

- Health partners supporting PHCs and dispensaries to follow-up on reporting by PHCs as well as referral of suspected cases for testing
- Health partners supporting PHCs and dispensaries to ensure that PHCs are applying covid19 precautionary measures including crowd control and use of masks
- MoPH is in the process of finalizing the national plan for COVID-19 vaccination. The document will be shared by WHO once finalized.
- The need to support TGH and HGH expansion units with missing items persists with no feedback from Health partners till now.
- In light of the deterioration of the socio-economic situation in Lebanon and the return to the old cost sharing scheme at the SHC level partners were reminded to check their capacity to support vulnerable refugees with patient share. Currently only 2 partners (SAMS and Caritas are providing Cash assistance to patients at hospital level in addition to IOCC under ECA program.

2. MoPH Updates (Ramia – MoPH)

- The Primary Health Care Department of the Ministry of Public Health, with the support of the World Health Organization, is carrying out a clinical research study on Covid-19 disease. This study aims to find out the number of people who have been infected with the virus that causes Covid-19 in Lebanon. This will help to understand the reasons why symptoms vary between people, to understand the differences in how it affects children, adults and the elderly, and to better plan future measures to control and prevent COVID-19 by the Ministry of Public Health. The methodology of the study includes the participation of people from the community, randomly selected, aged five years or more, to answer questions related to their health in addition to drawing a blood sample for testing to see if they have already had Covid-19. The blood samples will then be transported and stored at Rafic Hariri University Hospital, where an enzyme-linked immune absorption test will be performed.
- On September 2020, Regional Directors of WHO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and President of WONCA EMR officially launched the online training “Primary Health Care Practice in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic” <https://covid.emro.who.int>. The training covers the four main functions of primary health care in relation to COVID-19; namely:
 - maintaining essential health services.
 - preventing COVID-19 through supporting effective public health measures;
 - diagnosing COVID-19 cases and ensuring adequate referral;
 - and managing mild and moderate COVID-19 cases.

The online course is available in Arabic, English, Farsi and French languages. Trainees receive certificates of completion from WHO, accredited for 15 hours under the category 1 credit system of the American Association of Continuing Medical Education (AACME) and endorsed from the Arab Board of Health Specializations (ABHS). The contents are designed to be periodically updated, every eight weeks, to include the latest manuals, guidelines, and evidence-based information. Most recently, an update on vaccination is included. For the outline of

the training, please check the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbs3GMkHofw&feature=youtu.be>. An email was sent to encourage PHC physicians to register for the online training

https://worldhealthorg-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/abdelwahedr_who_int/EhsLKYYyX1tHnC2SC0Ff9vIBU2QEvYpCM8_JP-FXoGYIOg?e=MP7u9d

- The PHC Department at the MoPH, in cooperation with the IMC, is conducting an opinion poll about the COVID-19 vaccine through a community survey (within the scope of primary health care), to get a clear idea of the rate of vaccine acceptance and preparation for taking it. This questionnaire targets health workers in health centers.
- MoPH counts the number of health workers in health institutions to secure the COVID-19 vaccine for them, as they are among the groups that are classified within the global vaccination priorities. Therefore, an email was sent to PHCCs to enter the required information about the health workers in their centers through the PHOENICS computer system

3. COVID-19 Situation (Nohale – WHO)

- Nohale briefed Health partners on the current COVID-19 situation in Lebanon and shared with them COVID-19 key figures noting that there is a 43.6 % decrease in COVID cases this week with slight drop in positivity rate (from 20% to 18%) which is justified by the increase in weekly testing.
- 104 hospitals are currently receiving COVID cases (19 Public, 85 private). No additional hospitals were added last week. Efforts to increase bed capacity are continuous. Bed occupancy rate reached 77.8% for regular floor and 89% for ICU beds nationwide (100% in BML).
- WHO continue to support HR capacity in 12 public hospitals with 325 nurses for ICUs and 146 nurses for regular floors? WHO procured Equipment to support ICUs in 11 Public hospitals (including TGH and HGH). WHO is also supported the establishment of COVID-19 ward at Dahr EL Bashek Gov Hospital dedicated to receiving prisoners (6 ICU beds, 5 regular beds).
- 4 additional beds were added to HGH and 6 ICU beds in Baadba Gov hospitals as part of phase 2 of UNHCR hospital expansion plan in addition to 10 ICU beds at RHUH as part of phase 3.
- COVID-19 vaccination: Media campaign rolled out by MoPH to provide accurate information on vaccination and fight rumors and misconceptions. Q&As were also rolled out and updated on weekly basis.
- Health partners were asked to check their willingness and capacity to support MoPH in COVID-19 vaccination campaign.
- First batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines is expected to arrive on the 13th of Feb. the vaccination campaign will start next week. Lebanon is also expecting 304,800 doses of AstraZenica vaccine through COVAX in line of the COVAX commitment to reach at least 3% population coverage in all countries in the first half of the 2021.
- UNHCR mentioned that the north is the 3rd in Lebanon in terms of bed occupancy following BML and Bekaa. In the north bed occupancy rate is currently 89% for ICU and 72%.
- UNHCR shared the list of hospitals involved in the vaccination plan in the north: Habtour hospital, El Youssef hospital, HGH, Menieh Gov, TGH, Batroun Gov, Bcharreh Gov, Sir Denieh Gov, CHN, haykal Hospital, Kour hospital, Islamic Hospital and Salam Hospital.

4. Updates on COVID-19 Response (Farah – UNHCR)

- **RRT:** RRT activities are ongoing with the same partners. One RRT partner was not able to get permission to go to the field.

A new request to get the permit is to share the list of beneficiaries to be targeted through the filed activity, however partners were asked not to share any data on beneficiaries as this will need Data Sharing Agreement (DSA). Partners were asked to inform UNHCR in case any challenges related to movement was faced when implementing life-saving activities.

- **Hospital Expansion:** the expansion unit at TGH is ready to be used however it is still pending since they still have capacity to receive patients in the in-hospital ward. As for HGH, the expansion unit has been functional and receiving patients during the past 2 months.
- **Isolation Facilities:**
Two Isolation facilities are currently functional in the north (Tal Hayat IC in Sahel and Al Aziz IC in Fneidek). PU-AMI's support to Tal Hayat Isolation facility will end on the 19th of March. Health partners were asked to check their capacity to take over. A couple of meetings with WHO and RCCE on low utilization of ICs were conducted where it was highlighted the need to raise awareness on the use of ICs and on available services. A communication package will be prepared to encourage the community to use ICs. The referral pathways to ICs was updated as well to encourage the utilization of ICs by adding the option of self-referral (to be shared by UNHCR with the minutes). Partners discussed the reasons behind the difference in the number of patients admitted to Tal Hayat (25) vs Fneidek (58) which could be related to awareness campaigns which encouraged the community in Jered to use Al Aziz facility. There will be additional meetings with WHO and Authorities to discuss IC strategy and decide whether to keep these centers and drop them.

5. Critical activities and access to PHCCs during lockdown (Health partners)

- **Health Partners activities**
 - **IMC:** only life-saving activities will be implemented, request for movement is submitted through the online platform with no challenges. Staff presence is limited to 20%.
 - **IOCC:** prioritizing activities related to COVID-19 (IOCC-ESU team, RRT). PHC services, IYCF and MMU activities are ongoing. Limiting the presence in offices to 20%.
 - **PU-AMI:** PHCCs are open and receiving patients. Only life-saving activities are ongoing, as for staff presence it's limited to 20%.
 - **RI:** awareness sessions and mental health sessions (PSS and psychotherapy) were shifted to online modality. Intervention are limited to one project in some preselected CS and Substandard bldg. in Zouq Bhannine, Sir Ed Danniye, El Beddaoui, Bhannine El Minieh, Majdalaya zgharta, MiryataArde, Fouwar, Zgharta, Aadoui, Raouda, Deir Amar
 - **Al Midan:** Front-line workers are conducting health sessions remotely via online platforms.
 - **PCPM :** MMU activities continue as usual, PCPM supported clinic in Bireh is open and receiving patients.
 - **Mercy-USA:** The MMU activity in Akkar (Wadi Khaled) is still ongoing taking into account the COVID-19 precautions. the daily number of patients fluctuate from 50 till 70 ones per day per region.
 - **Order of Malta:** the MMU will continue operating as per the usual schedule with limited staff/shift (2 shifts/day).
- **Access to PHC:**
 - **IOCC:** 35% increase in consultation during the Feb 2021 especially ANC.
 - **IMC:** the number of consultations has increased and then stabilized same as before lockdown
 - **PU-AMI:** at the beginning of the lockdown the number of consultations decreased however later-on it increased same as any period of the year.

- **PCPM:** the number of consultations has recently increased by 20%.

6. Home care IMC model (Taher – IMC):

- IMC briefed the HWG on COVID-19 home care pilot project which has started on the 27th of Jan 2021 in Akkar and BML. The aim of this project is to provide medical outreach to COVID-19 suspected and confirmed cases with mild and moderate symptoms and living in the catchment area of selected PHCs. In Akkar the selected PHCCs for this project are Al Imane PHC in Bebnine, Kfartoun municipality clinic in Akroum and Al Bireh PHC. the role of IMC is to train PHCC staff on WHO/LSID guidelines, provide support with some items (medications, PPEs, IPC kits, equipment), rent oxygen concentrator if prescribed by the Physician and refer cases to MH and other services.
- The center's role is to will collaborate with municipalities and crisis cells to identify cases in addition to data entry of consultation on Phenics.
- The medical outreach team is consisted of 1 RN and 1 physician. The task of the nurse is to contact the patient to take his consent for physical visit, perform daily remote monitoring until recovery, identify and refer high risk cases to the doctor who will in his turn decide whether the patient needs hospital admission.

7. IMC Community Health Clubs (Zeina – IMC)

- IMC briefed the HWG on Health clubs which were created to raise awareness on Health-related topics through new channels and modalities.
- This program aims to eliminate misinformation related to health, engage beneficiaries in health and social activities and create support groups.
- Every group receives a full schedule of sessions on several health topics as per the need and the preference of each group during a period of 4-6 weeks noting that these sessions will be also customized as per the target age group or gender (Children 7-10 (Male, female), 15-17 (Male and Female) , 18-39 (male and Female) , above 60 (Male and Female)). Persons with disability are also encouraged to participate in these clubs.
- These sessions are currently conducted remotely over the phone on weekly basis. Each group is composed of 7-10 members.
- First session includes ice breaker, introduction, briefing on rules, objectives, IMC services, rights and responsibilities, provision of IMC accountability helpline for feedback and complaints. Pre and post-test are conducted for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- Before the lockdown IMC used to distribute refreshment and certain kits to health club members and used to conduct graduation ceremony and issue certificates however since the session are currently conducted remotely these were activities were stopped.
- During COVID-19 pandemic, IMC created COVID-19 clubs to provide 3 days awareness sessions on COVID symptoms and referral pathways, COVID-19 vaccination and Isolation centers, COVID-19 MH and GBV key messages and referral pathway

8. Updates on URDA dialysis program (Farah–UNHCR)

- URDA dialysis program funded by NORWAC is ending in April 2021. In the north 57 patients are supported by URDA program noting that 7 patients on the waiting list were added to the program however URDA had to reduce the number of supported sessions from 3-4/week to 2-3/week for all patients which lead to a huge gap as refugees cannot afford to pay the fees of third session or fourth session which may lead to interruption of sessions and consequently serious medical complications.
- UNHCR is doing lot of advocacy at central level and with donors; 1-2 agencies might be able to secure funding but nothing is confirmed.
- Partners were requested to discuss with management the possibility of support. Currently there is a need to cover 1 session per week per patient till end of April. And as of end of April there is a need to support 3-4 sessions/week/patient.

9. AOB:

- **IOCC:** ESU PCR campaign was resumed on January 15. Since then the team has been conducting PCR testing 5 times a week in different locations in T5 and Akkar. A total of 1008 tests have been conducted so far. The percentage of positive cases is 24.1%, meaning almost a quarter of the total tests done have returned positive.
- **UNHCR:** Habtour Hospital is preparing a Psychiatric unit with 6 beds which will solve the big gap since the beginning of covid pandemic. Saydet Zgharta is the only hospital currently receiving patients however they had to stop or reduce the number of admission due to infection of staff. MoPH national MH program coordinator visited Habtour hospital last week and provided recommendations for the accreditation.

Action Points

No.	Action	Focal Point	Deadline
1.	Health partners supporting PHCs and dispensaries to follow-up on reporting by PHCs as well as referral of suspected cases for testing	Health partners	Open
2.	Health partners supporting PHCs and dispensaries to ensure that PHCs are applying covid19 precautionary measures including crowd control and use of masks	Health partners	Open
3.	Health partners to check their capacity to support HGH and TGH expansion units with missing items	Health partners	Open
4.	Health partners to check to check their capacity to support refugees with the patient share in 2021	Health partners	Open
5.	Partners to check their willingness and Capacity to support MoPH in COVID-19 vaccination campaign.	Health partners	Mar 2021
6.	UNCHR to share the updated referral pathway to isolation centers	UNHCR – Farah	Mar 2021
7.	Health partners to Check their capacity to manage Tal Hayat Isolation Facility following PU-AMI's discontinuation of support.	Health partners	Mar 2021
8.	IMC to share the findings of IMC survey on refugees' refusal of Isolation Centers	Zeina – IMC	Mar 2021

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