

كلية طب وايل كورنيل في قطر Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar

Member of Qatar Foundation

Press Release

WCMC-Q Dean calls for new approach to public health

Doha – October 25, 2014: Dr. Javaid Sheikh, Dean of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) has said that the college's Your Health First campaign, run in partnership with the Supreme Council of Health, is providing evidence of effective ways to deliver a preventative healthcare initiative.

Dr. Sheikh delivered a lecture on 'Developing a framework for an effective population health initiative: evidence from Your Health First' at the inaugural WCMC-Q Grand Rounds event. As part of the lecture, targeted at healthcare professionals, Dr. Sheikh outlined the college's ambition to develop a new, more effective model for public health campaigns in order to reverse worrying increases in chronic conditions such as type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity. These interrelated conditions, which are largely caused by poor lifestyle choices, are particularly prevalent in the Gulf region but are also on the rise in almost all parts of the world.

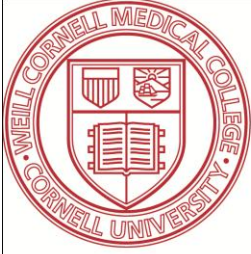
Addressing an audience of fellow healthcare professionals from WCMC-Q and its affiliate hospitals, as well as other healthcare professionals in the community of Qatar, and visiting faculty from Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, Dr. Sheikh said that modern medicine has a poor record in the field of preventative healthcare. He explained that the college aims to rectify this using evidence from its own successful public health campaign, Sahtak Awalan – Your Health First.

Dr. Sheikh said: "While modern medicine is very effective at treating disease, efforts to prevent people from becoming unwell in the first place by encouraging healthy lifestyles have not been anywhere near as successful. The alarming growth in the prevalence of preventable, lifestyle-related diseases means it is now high time we redressed that balance. We need to take a truly scientific approach to public health campaigns and preventative healthcare, just as we do with medical research and treatment, so that we can discover the strategies that really deliver results.

**Communications
Division
WCMC-Q
Education City
P.O. Box 24144
Doha, Qatar**

Nesreen Al-Refai
Chief Communications Officer
Phone: +974 4492 8650
Fax: +974 4492 8444
nma2005@qata-
rmed.cornell.edu

John Hayward
Senior Writer
Phone: +974 4492 8658
joa2036@qatar-
med.cornell.edu



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“Our own campaign, Your Health First, is providing us with a great deal of useful evidence about public engagement and this offers us a great opportunity to gain new understanding of this field and to develop the tools we need to meet some of the most pressing public health challenges of the 21st century.”

Dr. Sheikh pointed to a survey conducted by the World Health Organization in 2012, which reported that 70.1 percent of adults in Qatar are overweight and 41.4 percent clinically obese, while an estimated 17 percent of adults in Qatar are diabetic. Lifestyle factors such as lack of physical activity and overconsumption of calorie-rich foods are believed to be to blame for the high levels of obesity and diabetes in the country.

Dr. Sheikh said that Your Health First, a five-year campaign launched by WCMC-Q in 2012, was proving effective by utilizing a wide variety of platforms to engage with the public to provide information about healthy eating, exercise and the dangers of unhealthy habits like smoking. These platforms include social media, television programs, a smartphone app, radio commercials and traditional pamphlets.

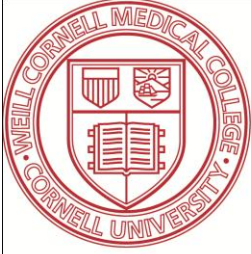
Crucially, the campaign also makes use of interactive events to encourage people to actually engage in the types of healthy behaviors the initiative aims to promote. To date, Your Health First has organized a healthy cooking event for kids called ‘Your Healthy Chef’, an annual physical sports competition for middle school students called ‘The Challenge’, and has provided greenhouses, gardening equipment and seeds to primary schools across Qatar to teach students the benefits of growing and eating fresh fruit and vegetables. The campaign has also joined forces with Qatar Foundation (QF) to provide healthy menus and incentive schemes to encourage students at QF schools to choose healthy options at mealtimes. Meanwhile, adults are engaged by positioning information booths at strategic locations in shopping malls and through a series of free, interactive health lectures called ‘Ask the Expert’, among several other initiatives.

Dr. Sheikh added: “By observing the strategies employed by Your Health First and determining which are the most successful, in addition to reviewing the available scientific literature, we aim

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nma2005@qata-
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Senior Writer
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to develop a framework for conceptualizing, constructing and delivering public health messages in the most effective way possible, as well as devising methods for assessing the success of public health campaigns.

“This will increase our capacity to implement public health strategies that make a real difference to the lives of people in Qatar and beyond, helping them to avoid debilitating conditions like type-2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease, which can have such a devastating effect on individuals and their families.”

The WCMC-Q Grand Rounds series is a new initiative of the college’s division of Continuing Professional Development that aims at engaging the healthcare professionals in the community, in Qatar and the region, to enhance their skills and knowledge on the latest in medical developments, technology, and good practices. This activity was developed by an interdisciplinary committee of experts in various areas of healthcare and research.

The next Grand Rounds event is scheduled for November 16 and will feature a lecture on ‘Gene Therapy: Human Genes as Drugs’ by Dr. Ronald G. Crystal, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York and Weill Cornell Medical College Bruce Webster Professor of Internal Medicine.

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About Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar

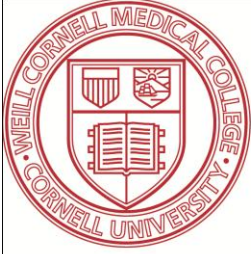
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers pre-medical and medical courses leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital who hold Weill Cornell appointments.

Through its biomedical research program, WCMC-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCMC-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to

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improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

For more info, please contact:

Hanan Lakkis
Media Relations Manager
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar
Mobile: +974 55536564
Direct Line: +974 44928661
hyl2004@qatar-med.cornell.edu

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