QATAR BIOBANK INAUGURAL CONFERENCE SHINES LIGHT ON NEED FOR REGIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION

Global experts emphasise value of Qatar's efforts and benefits for regional disease prevention

Doha, 16 February 2015: The importance of regional medical research collaboration was the focus of the '*Biobanking in the Context of Personalised Healthcare*' conference, hosted by Qatar Biobank, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, in Doha last week.

Inaugurated by Dr. Hanan Al Kuwari, Chairperson of Qatar Biobank's Board of Trustees, and Dr. Hadi Abderrahim, Managing Director of Qatar Biobank, the country's first biobanking conference saw international scientists come together to discuss the evolution of modern healthcare and the important role, and potential impact, of biobanking on future generations.

"Biobanking is one of the great healthcare opportunities of our time. Data collected by the Qatar Biobank will be used to help understand how lifestyle, environment and genes affect health locally, and will fully empower our volunteers to manage their own health. It will also play a critical role in helping develop treatments, and preventing disease, for future generations," said Dr. Hanan. "That process will only be enhanced by the collaboration and connections made by so many distinguished guests coming together for such a stimulating and rewarding conference."

Qatar Biobank supports Qatar Foundation's mission to enhance national innovation and technology through medical research regarding prevalent health issues in Qatar. Through its collection of samples and information on the health and lifestyles of large numbers of the national population, Qatar Biobank is making vital medical research possible for scientists in Qatar, the region, and the world.

The two-day symposium featured in-depth sessions that explored topics such as translational research, Middle East biobanks, and information generation and management within biobanking. Sessions were chaired by leading industry experts including, Dr Elena Cattaneo, Italian Republic Senator for Life and Director of the Center for Stem Cell Research at the University of Milano; Dr Paul Elliott from the School of Public Health at Imperial College London; and Dr Pasquale De Blasio, CEO of Integrated Systems Engineering Srl (ISENET).

"The notion of personalised healthcare has been around for some time, but with this conference we hope to take this idea to the next level, and explore preventative personalised medicine and collaborations across the region," said Dr. Abderrahim. "As

Qatar and its surrounding region sees an increase in diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, the need for population-based research becomes ever more apparent, as the need to understand our local communities' genetic makeup, environment, habits and lifestyles, increases."

The '*Biobanking in the Context of Personalised Healthcare*' symposium concluded with a roundtable discussion on the need for a biobanking network across the Middle East, in an attempt to lay the foundations for future cooperation between leading Qatari and global medical institutions.

Meanwhile, industry experts emphasised the regional value of the data that will result from Qatar Biobank's long-term initiative, since the Middle East remains an understudied population. Adding that, the advantages of such results would help not only identify the risk factors of diseases that prevail within the region's population, but also the development of optimised treatments.

Experts also emphasised that the future of personalised healthcare lies in the ability to combine active research with medical intervention, and such efforts could be enhanced by collaboration and knowledge sharing among regional biobanks.

Additionally, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, officially opened Qatar Biobank's new state-of-the-art facility in Hamad bin Khalifa Medical City, on the side lines of the '*Biobanking in the Context of Personalised Healthcare*' conference.

The official inauguration of the Qatar Biobank building follows the conclusion of its two-year operational pilot phase, the results of which provided a snapshot of the current health of the population, along with the identification of future risk factors - gathered from samples collected from 1,200 participants.

The results of the operational pilot phase recently revealed that a large portion of the sample population are suffering from obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and impaired lung functions, due to inactivity and smoking.

Home to local, regional and international scientists, Qatar Biobank aims to nurture the local medical research culture, by paving the way for breakthroughs that will ensure world-class personalised healthcare for Qatar's citizens and long-term residents.

The collection and analysis of DNA samples at Qatar Biobank complements the Qatar Genome Project, launched in 2013 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, with the aim of diagnosing diseases more accurately and hence implementing personalised treatment.

To become a contributor to Qatar Biobank, please fill out a form at www.qatarbiobank.org.qa/participating/what-involve, or for more information, please call +974 4439 8899, or email takepart@qatarbiobank.org.qa

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About Qatar Biobank

Qatar Biobank is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Working with the Supreme Council of Health, Hamad Medical Corporation and scientists from Imperial College London, Qatar Biobank enables medical research on prevalent health issues in Qatar. Through its collection of samples and information about the health and lifestyles of large numbers of Qatar's population, Qatar Biobank makes vital medical research possible for scientists in Qatar, the region, and the world. Qatar Biobank is a unique resource that will raise Qatar's profile in biomedical research regionally and globally.

For more information:

Please contact Diaa Elsadat, +974 7021 8285, diaae@bljworldwide.com