Arab States Strengthen Cooperation in Nuclear Medicine and Science

The timely and accurate diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases, including cancer, is a global issue, but among some Arab States in Asia, a significant shortage of cancer care infrastructure and capacities has stifled access to potentially life-saving nuclear medicine and radiotherapy. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Arab countries account for 11% of cancer cases globally, and are expected to experience a 270% increase in their cancer incidence between 2003 and 2030.

In the past 20 years, however, access to cancer care has improved significantly, as the IAEA, in close collaboration with partner institutions, has implemented a continuous series of projects to close cancer care inequity gaps in the region. Today, 80% of countries in the region have national cancer control policies, and since 2015, due in part to growing technical capacities, the number of oncology clinics in Arab countries has risen by 12%.

Arabic speaking countries, under the Co-operative Agreement for Arab States in Asia for Research, Development and Training Related to Nuclear Science and Technology, known as ARASIA — an agreement between the ten Arab states, facilitated by the IAEA, are going to increase their cooperation in this area under five Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) signed last month. The concurrent MoU signings are a first of their kind for ARASIA and enable the most technically-advanced Arab countries to support their neighbours in nuclear medicine, calibration of instrumentation, and in dosimetry and ensuring safety from ionising radiation.

On 25 February, five Memoranda of Understanding were concurrently signed with the aim of enhancing cooperation and knowledge transfer among ARASIA States Parties. (Photo: O. Yusuf/IAEA)

The MoUs designate specialised institutions as ARASIA Regional Resource Centres, and will facilitate the provision of expert support, access to research data, the organization of workshops and training courses, and the exchange of technical expertise to support the needs of countries in the region to further strengthen radiotherapy and nuclear medicine. The signatures, formalised at a ceremony on Friday 25 February at IAEA headquarters, coincide with the 20th anniversary of the ARASIA agreement.

“The designation of ARASIA Regional Resource Centres and signature of these agreements underpins an exemplary model of technical cooperation among developing countries, providing a vehicle for high quality services and for developing human resources that meet ARASIA State Parties’ needs and support the ARASIA Technical Cooperation Programme,” said Hua Liu IAEA Deputy Director General for Technical Cooperation. “It also provides ARASIA with an excellent tool for resource mobilization.”

"The signature of these agreements underpins an exemplary model of technical cooperation among developing countries, providing a vehicle for high quality services and for developing human resources," said IAEA Deputy Director General Hua Liu. (Photo: O. Yusuf/IAEA)

Signed between the ARASIA Secretariat and each institution, the MoUs cover cooperation with two nuclear medicine institutions: the American University of Beirut’s Medical Centre, and Kuwait’s Cancer Care Center; and three Secondary Standards Dosimetry Laboratories, namely: Jordan’s Secondary Standards Dosimetry Laboratory (SSDL), Kuwait’s Radiation Protection Department at Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization - Ministry of Health, and the National Radiation Metrology Laboratory of AECS in Syria.

Ten countries are States Parties to the ARASIA Agreement, namely Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. (Photo: O. Yusuf/IAEA)

A regional agreement for nuclear cooperation

ARASIA seeks to build cooperation in the fields of nuclear science and technology between Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Over the past two decades, ARASIA has contributed to the development of technical and human resource capacities in the region through more than 55 IAEA technical cooperation projects.

More than 116 training courses, as well as 234 fellowships and 72 expert assignments, have been organized through ARASIA, equipping professionals across a multitude of critical sectors with new skills and capacities in radiation oncology, nuclear medicine, diagnostic imaging and radiopharmaceutical production.

In recent years, institutions in the region have been indispensable to capacity building efforts and collaboration within ARASIA on peaceful nuclear applications. Beginning in 2018, technical and research institutions in ARASIA countries with advanced infrastructures and skills in specific thematic areas of nuclear medicine and dosimetry have supported emerging regional needs. These centres have helped train professionals, exchange expertise, collaborate on joint technical cooperation activities, and enhance technical standards within ARASIA institutions.

Source: https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/arab-states-strengthen-cooperation-in-nuclear-medicine-and-science