

# UNESCO Chair in Health Education: A Step toward Public Health Improvement

\* *M Moin, N Rezaei, M Yeganeh*

*Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute (IAARI), Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran*

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## Abstract

The UNESCO Chair in Health Education in TUMS (TUMS), Iran, was established in Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute in April 2004. The purpose of this chair is to promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation activities in the field of health education. The target group includes the public, health care workers, students, trainees and researchers. During its one year existing, the Chair has supported financially eleven admitted proposals and supported technically eight submitted proposals in divers fields regarding health issues with the cooperation of other research institutes in TUMS. It has made connections with most of the national research institutes and universities to establish multi-centric collaborations. The activities of the Chair are being directed towards the health priorities of the country and region. The Chair has contributed to an important international congress on immunodeficiency disorders as well as another meeting on Asthma in near future. The Chair is to publish several educational books, booklets and CDs related to health education; it is also going to prepare a thorough proposal on HIV/AIDS prevention with collaboration of other institutions, which could be applicable regionally, and in neighboring countries and states.

**Keywords:** *Health education, Public health, UNESCO, Iran*

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## Introduction

### ***UNITWIN Networks and UNESCO Chairs Programme***

Following the relevant decision of the General Conference of United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) taken at its 26th session the Programme of UNITWIN Networks and UNESCO Chairs was established in 1992. UNITWIN is the abbreviation for the UNIVERSITY TWINNING and networking scheme.

UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs projects deal with training and research activities and cover all major fields of knowledge within UNESCO's competence such as Education, Human Rights, Cultural Development, Environment, Basic and Engineering Sciences, Communication, etc.

The principal beneficiaries of this programme are institutions of higher learning in developing

countries and countries in transition. UNITWIN was launched with the aim of developing inter-university cooperation, while emphasizing the transfer of knowledge between universities and the promotion of academic solidarity across the world.

Since its creation the Programme has met with great interest from Member States and continues to develop steadily. From some 17 Chairs established in 1992 the number has today surpassed 590 established Chairs and interuniversity networks.

These projects are located at over 600 institutions in some 121 countries and involve thousands of academics, scholars and graduate students, as well as key partners from civil society and the economic sector. Over the last five years these partners have brought some \$30

million US dollars towards UNITWIN projects, a sum six times greater than UNESCO's own funding.

UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks, whatever their field of competence and regardless of the local or global problems they deal with, are directly contributing to the renewal and internationalization of higher education: of its systems, institutions, programs and courses (both formal and non-formal, at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels).

Activities falling within the established projects are all directed towards the achievement and reinforcement of higher education reform launched by UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 1998). Over the last ten years the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme has developed into a truly world-wide, interuniversity co-operation scheme based on interdisciplinarity, intersectoriality and networking. It has since become one of the major intersectorial Programmes and an integral part of activities developed by UNESCO's various Sectors, services and Field (Cluster) Offices.

The Programme was the subject of two evaluations- internal (1996) and external (2000).

Following the recommendations of the above evaluations and of the World Forum of UNESCO Chairs (November 2002) the future strategy will be oriented towards enhancement of the Programme's relevance, efficiency and impact on national development efforts. UNITWIN projects that have proved themselves sustainable will be pursued and new sub-regional, regional and international interuniversity networks will be established in all absolute priority areas of UNESCO (1).

### **UNESCO Chairs in Iran**

By current time no Iranian institution has involved in the UNITWIN programme while three UNESCO Chairs have been established in high ranked university centers. The main purpose of the chairs is to promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation in a special field of activity.

They serve as means of facilitating collaboration between high-level researchers and internationally recognized professors of the University and other higher education institutions in Iran and Asia.

UNESCO Chair in Biology, established in 1992 at the Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics (IBB) of the University of Tehran. The IBB Was founded in 1976 with the triple purpose of fulfilling research in the areas of biochemistry, biophysics and related areas, performing collaborative research activities with domestic as well as research centers around the world, and training students at the Master's and PhD level (2).

The UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, Peace and Democracy of Shahid Beheshti University, as the second chair in Iran, was established in the spring of 2001 on the campus university. The activities in the field of human rights are based on the international standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other relevant standard-setting instruments, on the principles of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights as well as on the principles of equality between men and women and non-discrimination (3).

The activities carried out by this chair include translation of several human right related resources to Persian, establishment of a specialized library as well as the United Nations Depository Library, Conduction of relevant workshops for a wide spectrum of target groups (educators, undergraduate students, governors and executives and human rights NGOs) and conducting research projects (4).



UNESCO Chair in Health Education Immunology,  
Asthma and Allergy Research Institute Tehran University  
Medical Sciences and Health Services

**UNESCO Chair in Health Education** On 27 April 2004, the Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, and Dr MR Zafarghandi, Chancellor, TUMS, signed at UNESCO Headquarters an agreement establishing a UNESCO Chair in Health Education at the TUMS

The agreement was signed in the presence of Dr Mostafa Moin, Head of the Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute, Mr Sadegh Kharazi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in France and Dr Ahmad Jalali, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO. Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute (IAARI), as a division of TUMS is the host institute of the chair (1, 4).



Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute

**Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute**

Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute was established in 2001 to train skillful researchers and conduct basic and clinical researches about allergic and immunologic diseases to promote mankind knowledge of such diseases and provide a better life for patients. Also this institute helps promote knowledge of students, residents, fellows, general practitioners, specialists, sub specialists and immunologists as well as patients and their families.

Conducting several research projects, publishing many articles and abstracts, organizing several scientific conferences, holding educational seminars for patients and their families, marking world asthma day every year and foundation of primary immunodeficiency registry are

some of the efforts this institute has done in these respects (5).

**Structure of the Chair** Although the agreement was made in April 2004, the Chair had been establishing its administrative structure and started working in September 2004. The Chair has two councils: **The High Council of the Chair**, which determines and establishes the policies and **the Council of Planning** which review proposals and projects every month. Both of the councils consist of academic staff and researchers, including: the president of TUMS; and his deans in Vice-chancellorship for Research, Vice-chancellorship for Health; the president and dean of Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute, the chair of School of Public Health in TUMS, and the presidents of following research center: AIDS Research Institute, Addiction Research Institute, Trauma Research Institute. The posts contributing to the Chair are Chair holder, Executive director, Secretary, and Members of committee. Thirteen academic staff and five full professors are as members of the high council and the council of planning (4).

**The Policies and Programs of the Chair**

According to the national and regional first line health problems, the priorities of the Chair activities have been determined: Addiction, AIDS, Tuberculosis, Asthma and Allergy, Diabetes and Osteoporosis, Trauma, and Environment.

The chair has developed a close cooperation with several institutions as TUMS-Vice-chancellorship for Research, Center for Environment Research, Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute, AIDS Research Institute, Trauma Research Institute, Addiction Research Institute, Iranian Society of Asthma and Allergy (NGO), and Iranian Primary Immunodeficiency Association (NGO) (4).

The policies of the chair can be summerized as:  
A) To promote the medical culture to improve health indices of the society

B) To develop national, regional and international scientific collaborations and connections

regarding education and research in the fields of prevention, sanitation and medical care.

C) To provide an educational research network between the universities, research institutions, scientific associations and other relevant national and international organizations.

D) To collect and document educational, social and research health information under the framework of the UNESCO chair.

The programs of the chair can be summerized to the following items:

### 1- Public Education

1-1- Holding conferences and educational seminars for the patients and their families; with assistance of other supportive and scientific institutions.

1-2- Publishing journals and booklets on general health education

1-3- Providing media education (television, radio...) in order to promote public's understanding of health issues.

1-4- Providing electronic learning facilities in order to promote public's understanding of health issues.

1-5- Assistance in construction of museums, expositions and festivals concerning the chair's objectives.

### 2- Academic Education

2-1- Holding short term specialized courses

- a) Country wide
- b) Regional and international

2-2- Holding classic and non classic training courses (individually or as a common program with other domestic or international institutions under existing regulations)

- a) Masters
- b) PhD
- c) Post-Doctorate

2-3- Holding scientific and applied workshops

2-4- Holding Conferences and seminars

2-5- Publishing specialized journals and books

2-6- Providing higher E- education programs

### 3- Scientific Research

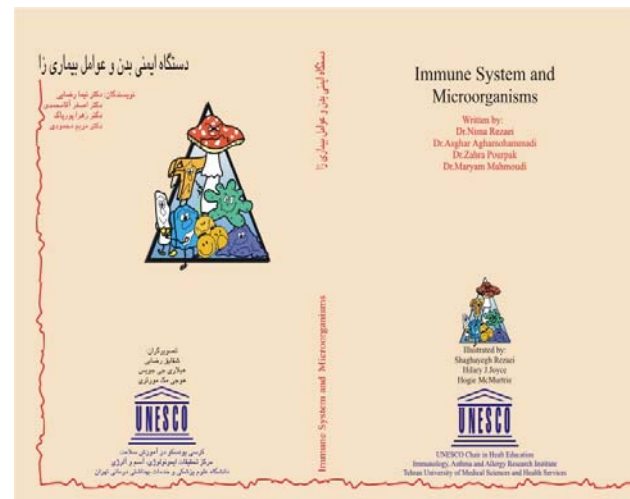
**Budgetary and Facilities** Immunology, Asthma and Allergy Research Institute (IAARI) provides the Chair with needed administrative

materials as computers, phone lines, and office utilities. The Chair has a special desk in the IAARI.

TUMS has pledged for promoting the projects of the Chair. Any institute, whose proposal is financially supported by the Chair, must provide at least 50% of the total budget.

During its one year existing, the Chair has pledged up to 283,172,500 Rials (almost 32,000 USD) for eleven admitted proposals and supported technically 8 submitted proposals in divers fields regarding health issues. The chair has tried to convinced regional and international fundations to support its projects (4).

**The Chair Activities** Till now, 8 regular meetings of the high council and planning council have been held (until March 2005). Nineteen proposals have been admitted whose target group are mostly the public. One of the main goals of the Chair is to improve the understanding of the health issues between the people and that's why the Chair has tried to support projects which aim vast target groups.



Immune System and Microorganisms A Guideline for patients with primary immunodeficiency disorders and their families

The publications of the Chair are mainly designed to be used by a general readership; i.e. the book of Immune System and Microorganisms has been published this year in Persian

language using the comments of 30 experts in the field of immunodeficiency. It has been written for the patients with primary immunodeficiency disorders and their families by simple sentences and many pictures. Moreover the following products will be published in coming year:

- \* Book and CD: Botanic Allergens in different regions of Iran.
- \* Book: Infantile Atopic Dermatitis.
- \* Book: Food Allergy.
- \* Booklet: Life skills Education for Health-volunteers.
- \* Booklet: Healthy Behaviors by Means of Life Skills for Health-volunteers.
- \* Educational package: Understandings about brucellosis and un-pasteurized dairy products for women.
- \* Book: Organ Transplantation: Medical, Ethical, legal and Religious Aspects.
- \* Booklet: What we ought to Know about AIDS.



First International Congress on Immunodeficiency Disorders 28 February- 2 March 2005 Tehran, Iran

The Chair has contributed to an important international congress on immunodeficiency disorders in February-March 2005 as well as another meeting on Asthma in November 2005. The Chair has also contributed to the Environmental workshops and Scientific Writings workshops and is going to support a post-graduate course on psychotherapeutic (non-pharmacological) interventions in substance abuse.



The 2nd Iranian Asthma Meeting 14-16 November 2005  
Tehran, Iran

Regarding the scientific research, the chair has supported the following research proposals:

- \* The study of anaphylaxis in patients referred to Children's Medical Center and providing the educational program for patients.
- \* Evaluation of knowledge and attitude practice of woman who go to healthy centers south of Tehran about used to un-pasteurized milk and its product and providing the educational pamphlet.
- \* Knowledge and attitude of health-volunteer about healthy behavior and providing the educational package.
- \* Health-related Quality of Life in HIV/AIDS patients and its relation to the socio-economic level and clinical-laboratory indices.
- \* Evaluation of effectiveness of positive parenting training in reducing disruptive behavior in children.

It is also going to prepare a thorough proposal on HIV/AIDS prevention with collaboration of other institutions which could be applicable regionally and in neighboring countries and states. All of these efforts are considered as the steps to make a more healthy society (4).

**The Future Activities** Regarding the regional conditions and the threat of spread of AIDS in Iran, the Chair is reviewing the possibilities to promote new educational programs in the region, including neighboring countries of Iran. To this purpose, with collaboration of AIDS Research Institute (TUMS), Iranian Center of

Disease Control, Iranian Red Crescent, and Tarbiat Modarres University, it has organized a committee for research in AIDS related fields with special stress on education to the youth. The Chair would seek new financial and human resources for this mean. It will also receive proposal or help to make comprehensive proposals (4).

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