

Iraq Ministry of Health Weekly Update

MOH-CPA Health Team Current Policies and Initiatives, Vol. 18, October 8, 2003

Highlights for the Week:

- **MOH Personnel Help 17 Iraqi Children Get Specialized Treatment in Germany**
- **Interim Minister Hosts Second National Conference of Directors General**
- **Senior Advisor Attends Graduation of First Battalion of New Iraqi Army Troops**
- **People in Profile: Entessar Ebrahim Essa, Making Nursing a Priority in Iraq**

Ministry of Health Personnel Help 17 Iraqi Children Receive Specialized Treatment in Germany

BAGHDAD— Ministry of Health Personnel under the leadership of Col. Fred Gerber have been working long and hard to help ensure that 17 special children from across Iraq receive specialized medical care in Germany. These children were assessed to need treatment best provided outside of Iraq and were medivaced from Baghdad International Airport on Sunday, October 5, 2003 to Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

Most of the children suffer from congenital, acquired or traumatic conditions; two of them have injuries resulting from the armed conflict. Working with authorities from the German state of Rheinland-Pfalz and in close cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ministry of Health identified these children and located German physicians, hospitals, and escorts willing to provide treatment for each individual patient. The United States Air Force provided air transportation for the children and their attendants free of charge. The German state of R-P has arranged for the very generous support of local German hospitals, the Red Cross, and patient sponsors.

Ministry of Health officials in cooperation with IOM and others continue to clinically evaluate patients on a daily basis. Most

patients can be cared for and treated by well trained Iraqi physicians in Iraqi hospitals. However, officials saw an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of these special patients. Following treatment the children will return to Iraq and rejoin their families.



Interim Minister Hosts Second National Conference of Director Generals

BAGHDAD—Dr. Khudair Abbas and the Ministry of Health hosted the Second General Conference of the Medical Directorates in Baghdad on October 8 and 9, 2003. This conference is the second to bring together the Directors General from all Iraqi governorates. In his first address to the Directors General since his appointment in September, Dr. Abbas stressed his goal of improving healthcare for all Iraqis, regardless of gender, religion or ethnic origin. The conference focused on financial and budget matters, introduced new salary scales for Ministry of Health personnel, and preventive medicine and primary health center issues. The group also discussed medical supplies and pharmaceutical distribution. Representatives from regional

CPA offices were also in attendance.

Senior Advisor Attends Graduation of First Battalion of New Iraqi Army Troops

KIRKUSH, Iraq—Senior Advisor Jim Haveman looked on as the first battalion of the new Iraqi Army graduated from basic training.

More than 700 proud new Iraqi troops marched onto the parade ground of the Kirkush Military Training Base to be congratulated by the Iraqi Governing Council and the Coalition for their dedication to a new, free Iraq. The battalion began their 9 week training course on August 2, 2003.

The Ministry of Health provides care for the New Iraqi Army and medical screenings at recruitment stations. The first battalion will become part of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division and work along side Coalition forces to protect Iraq's borders. A number of graduates will remain at the training base to become instructors for future battalions of the Iraqi Army.

Admiral Craig Vanderwagen Joins MOH Team

BAGHDAD—Admiral Craig Vanderwagen, Director, Division of Clinical and Preventive Services, Office of Public Health, Indian Health Service Admiral Craig (*continued page 2*) Vanderwagen arrived this week to lead the Public Health team. Admiral Vanderwagen joins a team that is making steady

progress in the public health sector and will also lend his expertise to environmental health issues. Admiral Vanderwagen plans to remain with the Ministry for four months.

Generator Update

BAGHDAD—Wherever you are in the world, health care facilities need generators. The facilities officers have been working tirelessly to deliver and install generators. Generators are arriving almost daily, and site preparations continue. Installation is 75 percent complete at six hospitals, pending final connections, and another four facilities have taken receipt of generators. The program continues on course to install a total of 128 generators and 10 uninterrupted power supply units.

People in Profile: Entessar Ebrahim Essa, Making Nursing a Priority in Iraq

Entessar Ebrahim Essa, Nursing Department Manager since 2001, is a 35-year-old woman with a clear objective in her mind: taking care of the others.

BAGHDAD—It was after she graduated from high school, she decided to attend a four-year course at Baghdad College of Nursing to help prepare for one of the hardest professions a woman can be confronted with in Iraq. Iraq is a country where girls don't seem to have a natural inclination for nursing: 80 percent of the country's nurses are men and only 20 percent are women. "It's not a question of inclination," says Ms. Essa. "Families usually disapprove females who want to be nurses.

It's disrespectful for a woman to have close contacts with men. That's the main reason why there are so few female nurses in Iraq." But Entessar didn't care. And her family didn't care either. "I was lucky," she explains. "My parents never held me back from doing what I figured was best for me."



This generalized disapproval is a deep-rooted social problem that the previous regime had vainly tried to restrain by increasing female nurses' salaries. Even with a bump in pay for female nurses, salaries were low: 3,000 Dinars a month, the equivalent of \$2.00 in the United States. "Although we earned more than our fellow colleagues, this didn't change people's opinion. Everyone kept thinking female nurses were unreliable, frivolous and irresponsible, and a few Dinars more wouldn't make the difference." "But now things are changing," says Ms. Essa. "I earn ... 400 US Dollars a month and, together with my colleagues and further medical staff, I'm preparing a 10-year Nursing Reform Plan."

Entessar is not married. She wouldn't say why, but it's most probable that the career she decided to undertake didn't allow her to lead a normal family life. Her devotion to the nurses' cause is amazing and she doesn't regret having chosen such a hard

lifestyle made of exhausting, and often frustrating, working days. "My main goal is to modernize nursing teaching programs in Iraq," she says. "After years of vain efforts I finally see a glimmer of hope."

Nursing doesn't have a licensure procedure in Iraq and institutions call any and all untrained staff "nurses" because they cost less. Lots of nurses start their training after 6 years of primary education. "This means they start working in hospitals when they're only 15," says Ms. Essa. "Now tell me, how can a 15-year-old girl stand up to a bunch of disrespectful men!"

Nursing specialists in community health, rehabilitation medicine and health education did not exist until now, and nursing schools are reviewing curriculum and their teaching methods that have not been revised in more than a decade. "A huge work has to be done," explains this resolute Ministry of Health Head Nurse. "Iraq urgently needs a professional nursing corps that can meet the country's needs: assertive advocates of all patients, team workers and well-trained professionals."

Entessar is conducting a hard battle. She wants nurses to be admired and respected; she wants them to be paid fairly and empowered to do whatever it takes to protect their patients from malpractice and negligence. "You know what has changed in these last few months?" she asks. "The awareness we will succeed!"

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