

CISEPO – a Model for Middle East and Global Cooperation in the Health Sector 09/03

The Canada International Scientific Exchange Program (CISEPO – www.cisepo.ca) is an international cooperation network of academics, researchers, educators, doctors, students, medical and public health specialists and allied health professionals working together, under a Canadian umbrella, as a team of Canadian, American, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian individuals and institutions. Though coming from many different disciplines, the CISEPO partners share a commitment to peace, professional engagement and dialogue, and improvements to the health and wellbeing of children, parents, and families in communities in every part of the region. Through our on-going professional engagement and dialogue across religious, political, and cultural borders, CISEPO is creating opportunities for peaceful co-existence, building cooperation and trust, identifying and sharing information about child health problems experienced by children and families of every background, building capacity and leadership within key academic and health care institutions in the region, serving as a role model for dialogue and cooperative development in the Middle East region. Professionals from throughout the region are drawn to CISEPO and our regional network because of our resolute long-standing commitment to non political professional engagement, equality, mutual respect, transparency, open communications, and the highest professional and ethical standards in both academic and health care settings.

Some examples of CISEPO's work, enabled through Canadian government and North American community support, operating successfully across the Arab and Israeli frontier, provide a flavour of CISEPO and what we are able to do that few other organizations can do in the context of the ever changing political situation in the Middle East using the common ground of the health sector to build social capital by:

- Addressing a critical regional public hearing health need due to the high prevalence of consanguineous marriages in Arab populations by implementing universal newborn hearing screening and habilitation in Jordan, equipping deaf children for life while impacting on Jordanian national policy, built through explicit Arab and Israeli cooperation at the people-to-people level through joint planning, testing and protocol development;
- Achieving ground breaking genetic discoveries, through research being carried out jointly by Israeli and Palestinian scientists, unlocking the mystery of genetic links causing some genetically transferred forms of hearing loss affecting Palestinian babies;
- Promoting high level professional academic and service exchanges among hearing health professionals which have enabled Jordanian and Israeli surgeons to study, train and operate together in pioneering cochlear implant surgery;
- Fostering joint Arab and Israeli professional development support and exchanges for high level medical and technical specialists, facilitating the establishment of the highest possible training standards for students and young practitioners as Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian partners cooperatively develop content and methodologies for curricula, professional examinations and training programs to ensure that regional medical students and specialists-in-training meet and exceed international standards;
- Establishing electronic videoteleconferencing simultaneously linking Canadian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian medical specialists, allowing for interactive case conferencing, training, exchange of information and the building of durable and productive cooperative professional relations and networks.

These CISEPO activities, and a multitude of other 'confidence building measures' implemented over the past fifteen years, have created a Canadian role model for peace building, with American CISEPO partners which can be replicated in other professional settings throughout the region, allowing people to see these practical measures as essential steps towards building an enduring regional peace based on CISEPO principles of peaceful coexistence, equality, mutual respect, transparency, the highest standards of personal behaviour and professional comportment. As the CISEPO health to peace model evolves and societal impacts take regional root, independent international evaluators are encouraging the concept that this Canadian model, utilizing the common language of transnational health benefits, engages our American colleagues and has global implications.

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