

Otolaryngology in the Service of Peace

Can you imagine Israeli and Palestinian medical students sitting around a campfire singing, volunteering and working together with children with cancer? It happened at Camp Trillium in Ontario, June 2003 – and summer student exchanges have occurred continuously since involving Canadian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian senior medical students in the field of pediatric emergency medicine. Can you imagine 60 Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians planning cooperative health projects together? It happened in Aqaba, October 2003 and again in Petra, October 2004. Can you imagine Jordanian national television covering a senior Jordanian and a senior Israel ear surgeon operating together, successfully carrying out cochlear implant surgery on deaf 30-month old twin boys? It happened in Amman, December 2003. Can you imagine every newborn baby in Jordan as of January 2005 having her/his hearing tested as a result of Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian service, educational, and scientific research cooperation and this project becoming national health policy in Jordan in 2007? And all of this and much more has happened because of CISEPO and its cooperation network of knowledge.

Otolaryngology, in strategic partnership with the disciplines of audiology and public health sciences, has provided the health service and academic basis for a uniquely innovative and sustainable cooperative Arab and Israeli health sector program over the past 14 years, underpinning the multidisciplinary CISEPO program. But when it all began, the "O" in CISEPO stood for Otolaryngology.

CISEPO is a Canadian registered charitable, volunteer organization based at Mount Sinai Hospital, in the Peter A Silverman Centre for International Health, and at the University of Toronto and strongly linked to York University, Toronto. Physicians, surgeons and public health specialists, alongside other health-care professionals, scientists, scholars and students from many disciplines have come together in Canada and the Middle East to better the lives of ordinary people. In so doing, cooperative activities reach across cultures and faiths, bringing Arabs and Israelis, as individuals and institutions, together on a people-to-people basis, building essential trust, confidence and mutual respect. Since 1995, CISEPO has provided an essential Canadian umbrella to develop successful cross-border health projects in the difficult region of the Middle East. Canadians are perceived as honest brokers, bringing Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians together for common purpose. A productive, collaborative and sustaining network has been created which works to address major health problems in the region.

The priority need initially identified was hereditary deafness, a significant public health issue for Arabs and Israelis alike. It is six to ten times a greater problem in Middle East populations than in the West. This genetic problem of nerve deafness has a major economic, social and health impact on infants, children, their families and societies in the Middle East. In order to find and treat poor and needy deaf Arab and Israeli newborns and infants in a comprehensive program, CISEPO brokered the establishment of the Middle East Association for Managing Hearing Loss (MEHA) in 1998. MEHA thrives as the first joint Arab and Israeli professional association. His Royal Highness Prince Firas of Jordan is its patron. MEHA serves as a model for developing other multilateral cross-border activities. At present hundreds of Arab and Israeli professionals and students work together, trying to build a brighter tomorrow and demonstrating that cooperation for common needs is not only possible, but also achievable. As of this writing, 180,000 newborns have been hearing tested and habilitated on the ground, mostly Jordanian, but also Israeli and Palestinian in this cooperative cross border initiative.

On the joint capacity-building, training and educational side, including Continuing Medical education (CME) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sponsored by CISEPO and the University of Toronto, over the past 13 years cooperative Arab and Israeli educational events, workshops and planning meetings have been held in: Amman (1996), Gaza (1997), Nablus (1997), Amman (1998), Petah Tikvah (1998), Amman (1999), Amman (1999), Jerusalem (1999), Abu Dis (1999), Tel Aviv (1999), Toronto (2000), Tel Aviv (2000), Bethlehem (2000), Toronto (2000), Tel Aviv (2001), Jerusalem (2001), Jerusalem (2001), Nicosia (2002), Cernobbio(2002), Haifa (2003), Beer Sheva (2003), Ankara (2003), Aqaba (2003), Tel Aviv (2003), Tenerife (2003), Amman (2003), Brussels (2004), Cernobbio (2004), Petra (2004), Toronto (2004), Amman (2005), Jerusalem (2005), Ashkelon (2005), Havana (2005), Jerusalem (2005), Vienna (2006), Amman (2006), Toronto (2007), Tel Aviv (2007), Irbid (2007), Toronto (2007), Washington (2007), Amman (2008)

A pioneering multipoint eHealth video teleconference - Canada, Israel, Jordan, Geneva (WHO), and South Africa – was held in June 2005 to start a new era of CISEPO/University of Toronto/Peter A Silverman Global

CISEPO: "building bridges to peace through health initiatives"

eHealth Program (PASGeP) eHealth rounds and health communications which now occur regularly in 2008 through the CISEPO cooperation network in the Middle East across the Arab and Israeli frontier.

In the basic science of the genetics of hearing loss, Bethlehem University (West Bank) and Tel Aviv University (Israel) have cooperated over the last 12 years in a fully integrated genomic research program which has recently produced its first PhD graduate and made ground-breaking genomic discoveries.

CISEPO's health service, educational and research activities are remarkable in such challenging circumstances. They succeed because of their inclusive, non-political nature and the tireless commitment of participants. CISEPO's programs have a dramatic multiplier effect, leading to other joint activities including nutrition, mother and child health, infectious disease and youth health promotion. The active participation of university deans, faculty and students, hospitals, health institutions and centers is unique on the international stage. CISEPO also relies on information and communication technology to advance its e-Health programs.

Charitable donations, international grants and government support enable CISEPO to conduct this important work in building bridges of understanding, cooperation and contributing to peace building.

The purpose of this background document is to be able to reflect on what has been accomplished in this arena beginning with ENT, to gather endorsement for this capacity-building for peace building initiative and to encourage Canadian, American and international colleagues and their institutions to consider their participation in CISEPO and American CISEPO.

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Please also see the CISEPO website at www.cisepo.ca

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