

Telemedicine Support for the Iraqi Health Sector: Building Bridges through Humanitarian Relief

*A one-day exchange of ideas as to how telemedicine might be used
to strengthen the health sector in Iraq*

On Friday May 23, 2008, a one-day event to explore options on how to employ telemedicine, communications technologies and an international workforce to strengthen the health sector in Iraq took place in Chicago, Illinois. The meeting, titled "Telemedicine Support for the Iraqi Health Sector: Building Bridges Through Humanitarian Relief," was held in conjunction with the visit to the United States by His Excellency Dr. Salih Al Hasnawi, Minister of Health of the Republic of Iraq. Sponsored by Chicago-based Center for International Rehabilitation (CIR), the Iraqi Medical Sciences Association (IMSA), the National Arab American Medical Association (NAAMA), and the Chicago Medical Society (CMS), the meeting was attended by 85 professionals who represent a distinguished cross section of leaders in the field of telemedicine.



Riad Almudallal, MD

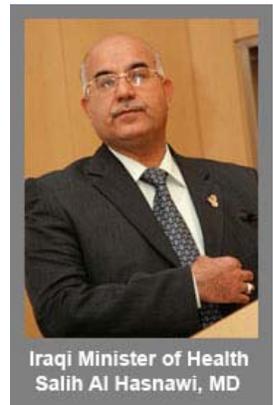
The day began with a two-hour plenary session. **Jay Sanders, MD**, President and CEO of The Global Telemedicine Group, addressed the plenary by giving an overview of what the day would entail. The first presenter was **Riad Almudallal, MD**, President of the Iraqi Medical Science Association. Dr. Almudallal discussed the potential for success for establishing a telemedicine link with the Iraqi health care system. He stressed that even faced with much adversity; that conference participants have the power to plant the seeds for growth and development in Iraq.

Dr. Almudallal then introduced the Iraqi Minister of Health, **Dr. Salih Al Hasnawi**. His Excellency discussed the current health care situation in Iraq and stressed the increased burden on resources as impeding access to health care for patients since 2003. Despite these challenges, Dr. Al Hasnawi remained optimistic that



Dan Sudnick

the global community could work together to provide the best quality of care possible to all Iraqi citizens, regardless of gender, religion and ethnicity. **Dan Sudnick, PhD**, Chief Financial Officer of Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) followed the Minister of Health. Dr. Sudnick, who has worked in Iraq since 2003 and has overseen the gradual rebuilding of land-line and cell phone communications systems throughout the country through public and private investment, discussed the existing telecommunications infrastructure in Iraq.



Iraqi Minister of Health
Salih Al Hasnawi, MD

The World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Iraq, **Naeema Al Gasseer, MD**, took the stage to speak about the more recent success of the Iraq Ministry of Health and the programs that the Minister has successfully implemented and orchestrated since acquiring the role. She also emphasized the organization's goal of engaging the global community to work in unison to transcend local barriers. U.S. Army's experience with store-and-forward telemedicine technology was then presented by **Colonel Ron Poropatich, MD**, Deputy Director of the Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC). Dr. Poropatich described the Army's successful track record of



Colonel Ron Poropatich, MD



Naeema Al Gasseer, MD

Continued on other side...

... Continued from front

employing telehealth technologies and expressed the ease with which such technologies can be incorporated in the Iraqi health care sector.



The presentation portion of the plenary ended with **Nabil Khoury, MD**, President of the National Arab American Medical Association (NAAMA) and **William Kennedy Smith, MD**, President of the Center for International Rehabilitation (CIR) introducing iCons in Medicine, a global telehealth and humanitarian medical volunteer alliance that uses the Internet to connect health care providers in remote and medically underserved areas with a network of committed volunteer specialty physicians who act as consultants on difficult cases. Dr. Khoury discussed NAAMA's commitment to joining the iCon community, while Dr. Smith invited conference attendees to join the iCons in Medicine program.

At the close of the plenary, invited participants broke up into individualized working groups. The workshops were organized in five key tracks, each of which was led by a Rapporteur:

- **Public health-** Eric Rasmussen, MD, Innovative Support to Emergencies, Diseases and Disasters
- **Health care delivery-** Rabih T. Torbay, International Medical Corps
- **Refugee Assistance-** Emmanuel d'Harcourt, MD, International Rescue Committee
- **Medical education and training-** Mike Brennan, MD , Medical Alliance for Iraq and Gary Selnow, PhD, WIRED International
- **War wounded-** Tammy Duckworth, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

The goal of the workshop participants was to discuss and debate ideas as to how telemedicine and communications technologies (i.e. store-and-forward technology, high-bandwidth synchronous connectivity, distributed learning, cellular technology, web-based approaches, etc.) can be applied to the Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in Iraq within the track area. Once multiple ideas were generated, participants prioritized the strategies to determine the top five potential solutions and further worked to develop those five ideas into potential programs or projects by focusing on best practices, appropriate use of resources and effective partnerships.

After the workshops concluded, the plenary reconvened to share the outcomes of the day. **Conrad Clyburn**, Director of Emerging Technology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. addressed the closing plenary by first introducing **Pat Patierno**, Executive Director, Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Mr. Patierno discussed the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF). The ITF model of international cooperation and co-funding was presented as a possible model for building a similar fund to assist health care in the Middle East. Mr. Pateirno was followed by each Rapporteur who presented a summary of their group's ideas.



A full report of the workshop findings is in the process of being published.

For more information regarding the meeting, visit www.iconsinmed.org