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Building a Regional Future for Healthy Ageing: The Story of MEAMA

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Across the Middle East and North Africa, a silent revolution is underway: people are living longer. Life expectancy has increased dramatically in the past few decades thanks to better healthcare, improved nutrition, and socio-economic development. Yet this demographic triumph presents a complex set of challenges for health systems that have historically been designed to serve younger populations. The question is no longer whether ageing populations will reshape healthcare but how societies will prepare for this transformation.

The Middle East Academy for Medicine of Ageing (MEAMA) was established in 2002 precisely to meet this challenge. MEAMA emerged as a regional answer to a pressing need: to equip physicians, nurses, researchers, and policymakers with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive care to older adults. It is not merely an educational initiative — it is a movement aimed at changing the way ageing is understood, taught, and integrated into healthcare systems.

Origins and Motivation

At the dawn of the 21st century, the Middle East faced a confluence of demographic and health trends. Fertility rates were declining, but longevity was rising, creating a growing cohort of older adults with complex healthcare needs. Most medical curricula in the region had little to no exposure to geriatric principles. In many countries, geriatric medicine was not recognized as a separate specialty, and training opportunities were rare.

MEAMA's founders, inspired by the European Academy for Medicine of Ageing (EAMA), decided to take action. Their motivation was deeply practical — to avoid a looming public health crisis — but also visionary, as they sought to create a generation of leaders who could advocate for older adults. They recognized that without such investment, healthcare systems would face rising costs, preventable complications, and poor quality of life for seniors.

Mission and Vision

MEAMA's mission is multifaceted: to build capacity, create a regional knowledge network, and inspire a cultural shift toward valuing the contribution of older adults. Its vision is one in which geriatrics is not an afterthought but an integral part of medical education, research, and clinical practice. By focusing on capacity building, MEAMA aims to produce a ripple effect — each trained participant goes back to their country not only with new knowledge but with a mandate to teach others, influence curricula, and implement evidence-based practices.

This mission is supported by four pillars: education and training, human resource development, networking, and research and publication. Each of these pillars reinforces the others, creating a sustainable ecosystem for change.

Education and Training

The Academy's flagship educational program is its two-year postgraduate course, which includes four intensive sessions. These sessions are immersive, covering not only clinical topics such as falls, frailty, cognitive disorders, polypharmacy, and chronic disease management but also ethical decision-making, communication skills, and health policy. Each participant is encouraged to present cases, share national data, and engage in group discussions, creating a highly interactive learning environment.

The model is deliberately participatory because MEAMA believes that passive learning does not create leaders. Participants are mentored by international faculty, including leading geriatricians and researchers, ensuring exposure to global best practices. The program has been credited with sparking new geriatric units, memory clinics, and academic courses in several countries.

Human Resource Development

Education alone is not enough; MEAMA has focused heavily on developing a pipeline of leaders. The Academy identifies promising participants and encourages them to pursue further training, academic appointments, and leadership positions. Many alumni now lead geriatric departments, national dementia programs, and public health initiatives.

By building this critical mass of trained professionals, MEAMA is ensuring that change is institutionalized and not dependent on a single champion. This approach has helped establish geriatrics as a formal discipline in several Middle Eastern countries.

Networking and Regional Collaboration

The creation of a regional network is one of MEAMA's most lasting achievements. Participants from across Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, and other nations have met, collaborated, and formed lasting professional bonds. These connections have led to joint research projects, shared conference platforms, and cross-border training opportunities.

Networking also provides emotional and professional support for clinicians working in isolated settings, giving them a sense that they are part of a wider movement.

Research and Publication

MEAMA has not only trained clinicians but also promoted the development of a regional evidence base. Participants are encouraged to design research projects relevant to their national contexts — studies on dementia prevalence, risk factors for falls, models of long-term care, and public health interventions for healthy ageing. The Academy also provides mentorship on writing and publishing papers.

To amplify these voices, MEAMA has supported the creation of regional journals such as the Middle East Journal of Age and Ageing, ensuring that Middle Eastern research is visible to an international audience.

Achievements and Expansion

To date, more than 600 healthcare professionals have completed MEAMA's postgraduate program. The Academy has expanded geographically with the creation of the Maghreb Academy for Medicine of Ageing (MAMA) to serve North Africa, and it has launched specialized programs like the Postgraduate Diploma in Dementia Care. These initiatives reflect MEAMA's responsiveness to regional needs and emerging challenges.

The dementia course is particularly noteworthy, as dementia rates are rising across the region. The hybrid format — part online, part in-person — has allowed busy clinicians to participate without leaving their clinical duties for extended periods.

Partnerships and Global Standing

International collaboration is a defining feature of MEAMA. The Academy is the official satellite center for the International Institute on Ageing – UN, Malta (INIA), which provides global recognition of its certificates and diplomas. MEAMA also collaborates with EUGMS, IAGG, and various academic institutions, ensuring that its curriculum reflects the latest scientific advances and policy recommendations.

Leadership and Governance

MEAMA is guided by a robust governance structure. The Executive Committee, chaired by Dr. Abdulrazak Abyad, sets the strategic direction. An International Scientific Advisory Board provides global oversight, while a Regional Scientific Advisory Board ensures the content is relevant to local needs. This dual approach balances international standards with cultural sensitivity.

Shaping the Future

Looking ahead, MEAMA is embracing digital transformation. The Academy is developing online modules, webinars, and virtual conferences to reach a wider audience. It is also working on competency-based curricula that align with global geriatric education frameworks.

Its long-term vision is ambitious: to make geriatrics a core component of every medical school curriculum in the Middle East, to influence national health policies, and to ensure that every older adult has access to high-quality, age-appropriate care. In doing so, MEAMA is not just training professionals — it is shaping the future of ageing in the region.



MIDDLE EAST ACADEMY FOR MEDICINE OF AGEING

Mission

To create a hub for education, training, and research in ageing and geriatrics across the Middle East and North Africa

Strategic Pillars



Education & Training

Structured courses and congresses in gerontology



Human Resource Development

Increase trained geriatricians and reduce stereotypes



Networking

Build regional and international professional links



Research & Publication

Stimulate studies and policy-relevant research

Activities & Achievements

- Seven postgraduate programs (2003-2022)
- Dementia care diploma courses
- Expansion with the Maghreb Academy for Medicine of Ageing
- Founded multiple regional medical journals

Governance

- Led by an Executive Committee and Chair