

# Creating A Cooperative Drug Abuse Research Network in the Middle East

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# Building Regional Research Partnerships

- Organizing question: In areas of the world where there is limited drug abuse research activity, is it possible to create a synergy, increased research volume and increased efficiency by linking with multiple research partners in a region and building a multi-element research network?
- Moving from individual projects to a research network

# The foot in the door

- 1997 invitation from Richard Isralowitz (Israel) and Mohamed Afifi (Palestine) to participate in an exploratory meeting about the nature of the drug abuse problem in Israel and Palestine. (Funding in part provided by USAID via the US Embassy)
- Training sessions provided to 4 audiences

# Collecting information, determining needs, identifying funders

- Over the next 3 years, we conducted a series of clinical trainings and data presentations in Israel and Palestine
- Areas of information need identified
- Research topics, questions, priorities determined
- Search for funders initiated

# Research Funders

- US Department of State
- NIDA (Supplements, CPDD travel, Fogarty, Humphrey, Distinguished International Scientist, R21 and R01...hopefully)
- EU and European governments working in the Middle East
- UNODC
- WHO
- Regional Governments
- Foundations (Ford, Rockefeller, Institute for Peace)
- Pharmaceutical Companies \*\*

# Middle East Regional Cooperative (MERC) Program

- Program to build scientific cooperative work in Middle East.
- A Substance Abuse Monitoring System for Israeli and Palestinian Communities
  - 2001-current: Surveys of youth in Palestinian and Israeli communities to determine nature and extent of the drug use problem
- A Substance Abuse Monitoring System for Egyptian and Israeli Communities
  - 2003-current: Implementation of the ASI in multiple sites in Egypt and Israel

# MERC Results

- First data ever on the nature and extent of drug/alcohol use among youth in Palestine
- First extensive data on drug use among high risk youth in Israel
- First attempt to collect systematic data on individuals admitted to drug treatment in Egypt
- First extensive data collection effort on the nature and extent of drug use among immigrants into Israel from the former Soviet Union
- Valuable technology transfer experience to examine the application of the ASI in Egypt and Israel
- See Posters on Sunday

# MERC Activites

- Training around data collection
- Conference Presentations (CPDD, ISAM, CEWG, WPA, others)
- Publications
- Many presentations in community, universities, professional organizations
- Promote and support related training and development (eg Palestinian training at Behman Hospital)
- Promote and participate in regional meetings (eg Cairo meetings Oct 2004, thanks to NIDA, WHO, UNODC, Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Behman Hospital, Deni Carise, Tom McLellan, Frank Vocci, Ahmed Elkashef, UCLA colleagues)

# Next Steps

- Institute of Peace Meeting (with added support from NIDA, UNODC and WHO)
  - Funding provided for a meeting of leading international researchers/policy makers on the topics of integrating substance abuse services with primary care, mental health and social service agencies, Istanbul, Turkey Sept 4-8, 2005. 22 Countries representing Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa. Hoped for outcome will be a WHO initiative to promote service development and integration in developing countries. We hope to be involved in a data collection effort to evaluate the impact of this process
- NIDA R21 and R01s
- EU and Foundation Applications

# Lessons Learned

- Find people you like working with
- Create an agenda to meet research needs of the region (eg. Research agenda in Palestine is different than Israel, is different than Egypt, but common threads can be identified)
- Willingness to provide training to a variety of audiences to build local support for development of research and establish partners
- Maintain awareness of political realities and sensitivities
- More participants is not necessarily a good thing