WCMC-Q Eases Data Dearth in MENA
HIGHLIGHTS

02 News Briefs
Events in the world of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar and its partners.

06 WCMC-Q Group Eases Data Dearth in MENA
Epidemiology group provides data to improve public health throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

08 Education City Builds Green
New residence halls will provide comfort while promoting conservation.

15 WCMC-Q Student Speaks from Heart at Historic World Cup Bid
Poignant speech plays a part in bringing the FIFA World Cup to Qatar in 2022.

16 WCMC-Q and CMU-Q Share New Perspectives on Teaching English
Annual conference provides strategies for improving English language teaching in Qatar.

23 Meeting the Needs of Muslims
A new study provides guidance on Muslim sensitivities in the health care system.
WCMC-Q Brings DALM Conference to Doha

With the support of Qatar Foundation, WCMC-Q is bringing the international DALM conference to Doha in March. It is the first time the prestigious conference has been held outside of New York City or Milan, Italy, since it started in 1960 under the support of the Giovanni Lorenzini Medical Foundation.

The conference will present the latest information related to research on and treatment for diabetes, obesity, and the metabolic syndrome, particularly as they affect the Middle East and North Africa region. The disorders pose significant public health challenges for Qatar and other countries in the region and around the world.

"We are honored to have the support of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, chair of Qatar Foundation, in bringing this valuable symposium to Qatar. It is an important step in making scientific findings to address the emerging pandemic more accessible to physicians and health care practitioners in the Middle East," says Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q.

Participation at the symposia has increased from 200 registrants in 1960 to more than 2,000 from 80 countries at the latest conference in New York in 2007.

The DALM XVII International Symposium in Qatar is organized and supported by Qatar Foundation, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, and the Giovanni Lorenzini Medical Foundation. It will be held at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Doha March 14-16.

It’s an important step toward making scientific findings more accessible throughout the MENA region.
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar welcomed 108 new students into its medical, premedical, and foundation programs for the new academic year.

Forty students, including five Qataris, joined the four-year medical program. Forty-nine students, including 10 Qataris, joined the two-year premedical program, and 19 students, including 15 Qataris, joined the foundation program.

“We are delighted that WCMC-Q continues to attract some of the most talented students from Qatar and the region,” says Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q. “With them, we will continue to build a knowledge-based society in Qatar and the region led by the vision of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, consort to the Emir.”

108 Students Enter New Academic Year

After the white coat ceremony, new medical students stand with Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, acting associate dean for admissions and student affairs, Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean, and Dr. Lyuba Konopasek, associate dean for medical education.

Welcoming activities by the Department of Admissions and Students Affairs help new students feel at home.
It's official. Sidra Medical and Research Center will be Qatar's newest academic medical center with the Oct. 18 signing of the historic affiliation agreement by officials of Qatar Foundation and Weill Cornell Medical College at a meeting of the Joint Advisory Board of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar.

"Together, we will begin to recruit the highest caliber physicians, surgeons and health professionals across the full spectrum of patient care, medical education and residency training as well as biomedical research" says Dr. Ghalia Bint Mohammed Al-Thani, co-chair of the WCMC-Q Joint Advisory Board and president of Qatar Foundation, and a member of the Joint Advisory Board for Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, who signed the affiliation agreement with Dr. Antonio M. Gotto, Jr., dean of Weill Cornell Medical College in New York. “The great medical schools and hospitals are the ones that contribute new knowledge, new procedures and new treatments, which cannot be done without extensive investment in research that attracts the very top quality health professionals. His Highness the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani has endowed Sidra Medical and Research Center with an endowment of nearly $8 billion, the largest endowment for any academic medical center in the world,” says Dr. Saoud. “The vision of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, chairperson of Qatar Foundation and chair of Sidra Board of Governors, is to develop Sidra as a beacon of knowledge for medical education and research throughout the Middle East.”

Under the affiliation agreement, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar will be the primary partner for Sidra Medical and Research Center. Most of the physicians at Sidra will be Weill Cornell Medical College faculty members. “This agreement is very important to us,” says Javaid Sheikh, M.D., dean of WCMC-Q. “In addition to the clinical education at Hamad Medical Corporation, our students will learn to provide the best patient care, using Sidra’s advanced technologies such as robotics, computer-aided surgery and diagnostics, digital imaging, and electronic patient records. The involvement of our faculty members in Sidra’s patient care, research, and medical education and resident training will allow us to fully integrate our tripartite mission,” says Dr. Sheikh.
WCMC-Q investigators have received 15 new grants totaling $15.2 million from Qatar National Research Fund’s National Priorities Research Program (NPRP) for advanced studies in diabetes, stem cells, cancer, viruses, desertification and more.

The studies involve significant international collaborations as WCMC-Q helps build biomedical research capacity in Doha.

Two of the funded studies focus on type 2 diabetes, which affects about 17 percent of the local adult population. Additionally, several stem cell projects will move forward, including creation of a core laboratory to produce disease-specific human induced pluripotent stem cells of Qatari origin. Other grants will support research on the effects of shisha smoking in Qatar as well as vaccine development, the genetic signature of cancer, and studies of the impact of the human papillomavirus in certain Arab countries.

Our researchers have one goal in mind: to improve the lives of the people of Qatar and the world by providing new knowledge and cutting-edge approaches to health care across all sectors,” says Dr. Javid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q. “With support from Qatar National Research Fund, we are able to put plans into motion, work toward the goal and increasingly draw top-tier researchers to this worthy mission in Qatar.”

The grants are the third cycle of NPRP funding. (See story on desertification project funded by an NPRP grant on p. 23.) Like last year, biomedical research ranked second only to funds allocated toward engineering research, a clear indication of the country’s dedication to this area of investigation.

NPRP grants are awarded based on the research design as well as the subject and the ability to address national needs.

New NPRP Grants Total $15.2 Million

UREP Grants Support Student Research

WCVMC-Q researchers and students received grants for 12 projects through the Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP). A quarter of the studies focus on the development of diabetes at the molecular level while others look at topics such as obesity among Qatari women, ethics around cancer diagnosis, and health factors affecting pregnancy.

The WCMC-Q students—35 in total—will work under the guidance of a faculty member to gain valuable, hands-on research experience.

“At the premed level, many students don’t have the background to set up investigations. Working with us gives them a great deal of valuable basic research experience,” says Dr. Abdulbari Bener, research professor of public health.

Dr. Bener has been overseeing teams of student researchers working with UREP grants for the past three years and says that most of them want to come back and work on another project.

“The UREP experience gives us the ability to think and work like a researcher,” says Bassel Saksouk, a second-year medical student at WCMC-Q. “Formulating and testing new hypotheses is a skill doctors need.” (See story about students presenting UREP research in Spain on page 21.)
Scientists have long debated the status of the HIV/AIDS infection and the availability of related data in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

“One camp insisted the region is immune to HIV because of its socio-cultural fabric, while the other camp claimed that there was a massive epidemic ‘behind the veil’ with communities and governments covering up the infection,” says Laith Abu-Raddad, Ph.D., assistant professor of public health and principal investigator of the Infectious Diseases Epidemiology Group (IDEG) at WCMC-Q.

"A debate with such radically opposing views signals a research opportunity; the truth must lie somewhere between the two camps,” says Abu-Raddad, who investigated the status of the HIV/AIDS infection in MENA for the World Bank, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, and the World Health Organization.

Taking the MENA HIV Epidemic Out of the Dark

During a period of seven years, Dr. Abu-Raddad and colleagues conducted the MENA HIV Synthesis Project, a comprehensive systematic review of HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and risk behavior studies and data in MENA. The result was a report released in June entitled “Time for Strategic Action” that provides the first comprehensive scientific assessment of the spread of HIV in MENA across different population groups throughout the region.

The truth did, in fact, lie somewhere between the two camps. Abu-Raddad learned that with the exception of small areas in Djibouti, Somalia and Southern Sudan, HIV transmission in the general population of MENA is limited and among the lowest in the world. Nevertheless, there are small population pockets of risk throughout in the region and HIV is already spreading among some of these populations.

The research has important policy implications. “Resources for HIV intervention are being spent overwhelmingly on the general population. Our research clearly indicated HIV response in MENA should focus on high-risk groups, not the general population where transmission is very limited,” says Abu-Raddad.

The synthesis project yielded another surprise for Abu-Raddad. Contrary to longstanding perceptions, there was plenty of data about the HIV epidemic in the region. The systematic review covered many data sources including Medline, Google Scholar, reports and databases for international organizations, and publications for governmental and nongovernmental organizations in all MENA countries. “We identified, reviewed, and analyzed more than 5,000 sources of data related to HIV and sexually transmitted infections. While the quality of the data and the nature of the study designs varied substantially, there was plenty of information relative to what we expected at the onset of the study.”

Sharing Findings with the World

In August, Abu-Raddad was co-author on a paper with DeWolfe Miller, Ph.D., of the University of Hawaii in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences about Hepatitis C transmission rates in Egypt.

Like the HIV/AIDS report, it filled in another large knowledge gap. The study found that Egypt had the highest rates of Hepatitis C virus transmission in the world, with more than 500,000 new infections every year.

“The study opened our eyes to a disease burden similar in scale and challenge in several ways to the HIV problem in Sub-Saharan Africa: millions of cases of an infection for which there is no vaccine, no effective treatment, and case management that is so expensive it is beyond the reach of most patients,” says Abu-Raddad.
For Abu-Raddad, publishing the group’s research findings on HIV and HCV is a milestone in his career. “It’s been my dream to return to the region and conduct original research related to its important issues,” says Abu-Raddad, a native of Jordan who started his studies in computational physics before moving to epidemiology and biostatistics. He trained in the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

Dr. Abu-Raddad was recruited to WCMC-Q in 2008 and shortly afterward was tasked with the development of the biostatistics and biomathematics research core to serve the medical college’s research program. Since his arrival in Doha, he started the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Group and has been joined by two full-time researchers, Ghina Mumtaz, M.Sc. and Hiam Chemaitelly, M.Sc.

Mumtaz, who joined the group in late 2009 from the American University of Beirut after six years managing a research program in perinatal and neonatal health, is currently leading the scientific output phase of the HIV Middle East project. She has already played the key role in two studies within this project; one documenting the emerging HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men in MENA and the other reviewing the distribution of the different HIV subtypes in this region. She has also played the leading role in a study delineating the modes of HIV exposure in Morocco.

“It is so exciting to explore for the first time in our region a public health issue of global dimension such as the HIV epidemic,” says Mumtaz. “Our findings in MENA have important policy implications because the epidemic is still in its early phases and there is a window of opportunity for prevention.”

Chemaitelly joined the group earlier this year after four years as an instructor and researcher at the University of Balamand in Beirut. She is currently leading several studies focusing on understanding the role of coinfections in HIV epidemiology, determining the extent of HIV incidence among stable and marital sexual partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa, and designing and assessing the impact of combination packages of HIV interventions.

The point of scientific research is not only to understand the world but also to change it in a positive direction.

“My work focuses on understanding the puzzle of why the HIV epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa has reached such massive levels in contrast to all other regions,” says Chemaitelly. “Based on a satisfactory understanding of the drivers, we want to design packages of HIV prevention interventions and assess their impact on HIV spread.”

In August, Abu-Raddad, Chemaitelly, and Mumtaz, presented their work at the International AIDS conference in Vienna, Austria.

From Science to Policy

The group’s shared value is that scientific research aims not only to understand the world, but also, to change it in a positive direction. Most IDEG research is strongly tied to the formulation of public health policy at the international, regional, and local levels. IDEG research has directly formed or informed policy in different projects at various levels since its inception.

“Our goal is to provide the data necessary to formulate evidence-based policies that improve public health in Qatar, the MENA region, and beyond,” says Abu-Raddad.

-By Kristina Goodnough
When students move into Education City housing in the fall of 2012, they will occupy two new residence hall complexes, currently under construction, which will take Qatar to the forefront of sustainable living.

From the start, design and construction of the new residence halls aimed at achieving the highest rank—platinum—in the green building certification system known as Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED), which is coordinated by the United States Green Building Council.

“These buildings are the first buildings in the country designed with LEED certification in mind from the beginning. When they open, they will be the largest collection of LEED platinum certified buildings in the world,” says Christopher Silva, Education City sustainability education coordinator. “They have kick-started the green building movement in Qatar,” he adds.

Education City is leading that trend and now intends to design all its future buildings to achieve at least gold certification, the second highest rating for new construction. Some older Education City buildings may also seek certification for their daily operations and maintenance, says Silva.

The new residences are arranged in two identical but separate “villages,” one each for male and female students, modeled on traditional Arab towns. Each consists of two residence halls and three buildings of apartments for upperclass students. At the center of the village is a community center, a focal point of activity for the residents, containing classrooms, computer labs, a cafeteria, meeting areas, multi-purpose rooms, spaces for small businesses, and the housing and residence life staff offices.

An Emphasis on Comfort and Conservation

In addition to modern comforts and conveniences such as wireless Internet, flat-panel TVs, and built-in MP3 player connections, the rooms and public lounges will also have features designed to conserve natural resources, reduce emissions, and improve indoor environmental quality. Low-flow fixtures will keep water use to a minimum, and a filtration system will clean water from sinks and showers to be reused in toilets, fountains, and for watering plants. All told, the halls will use 40 percent less water than normal buildings of their kind.

Power use will be reduced through motion-sensor light controls and an identification-card-activated power system in the rooms, similar to that used in modern hotel rooms.

A sunlight capturing system—used here for the first time in a residential setting—will transfer natural sunlight to hallways through fiber optic cables, reducing the need for electric lights or windows that transfer unwanted heat. There will be plenty of direct natural light as well—75 percent of the interior space will have windows oriented to maximize light and minimize heat.

Even the carpeting, paint and furniture were selected to contain the lowest available chemical and toxin content to promote better air quality.

Screens in public areas will educate students regarding sustainability, detailing how much energy the building’s solar panels and wind turbines are producing, and how much water is being saved at that moment. Students can then compare their energy use with the other halls. Silva and the residence life team plan to use this feature to hold inter-building ‘energy wars’ as just one activity designed to both educate and build community.

The educational possibilities of the buildings will also extend far beyond the Education City students living there. LEED buildings garner a great deal of attention. The Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., with one LEED platinum building and one gold, attracted some 9,000 visitors in just their first two to three years of operation. With 12 platinum buildings in the Education City residences, tour programs are being established to manage the flow of visitors.
“We also want to make sure that the local school community comes to these buildings as much as possible to use them as a learning tool. We are developing a curriculum guide for K-12 schools in Qatar.

As they cover solar power, wind energy or local plants in the classroom, teachers can use our facilities to show these things to their students and how they fit into a living environment,” says Silva. 

-By Chris Gibbons
Two Weeks in the Life of A Doctor, Scientist

Chiefs’ rounds at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City can be a nerve-wracking experience. Residents present cases while their colleagues and senior physicians fire questions about the patient’s symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis. Sitting around a small table in a cramped conference room, there is nowhere to hide.

Nora Sawan Al Awam and Abdulaziz Majid Al Malki were perhaps slightly more nervous than anyone else in the room.

Nora, 17, and Abdulaziz, 16, high school juniors from Doha, each received a Doctor of The Future Scholarship, which included a trip to Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City for two weeks of invaluable experience in the laboratory and lecture hall. The scholarship is given to the winners of the annual Healing Hands essay contest, one of WCMC-Q’s primary outreach programs. In addition to shadowing physicians and donning lab coats, goggles and gloves to work with cell cultures, Nora and Abdulaziz sat in on a chiefs’ rounds session with Dr. Ronald Crystal, chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine, and Dr. Joseph T. Cooke, associate professor of clinical medicine.

“We saw what real doctors and real scientists do. It was an amazing experience.”

The high school students learned basic laboratory skills, including pipetting and antiseptic techniques so they could participate in ongoing experiments, including culturing cells and photographing the various stages of the cells’ growth.

“This is not stuff that normal high school kids get to do,” Abdulaziz says. “They showed us every part of the hospital and medical college, and we saw up close what real doctors and real scientists do. It was an amazing experience.”

Near the end of their stay, Abdulaziz and Nora made a presentation to Dr. Crystal and his colleagues at the genetics therapies meeting. There, the two students discussed their work on cell differentials and staining techniques that allow the researcher to determine how many of each type of cell they have. They also reported on their experiments with pulmonary diagnostics and lung function testing, as well as the screenings of several patients involved with clinical trials.

“They showed us so much in such a short time,” Nora says. “We were able to see all the different parts of a hospital, watching doctors work with patients, seeing medical students and the laboratories.”

“I don’t think when I was 17-years-old, I would have been able to go to another country and handle myself as admirably as these two young people have,” Dr. Crystal says. “Nora and Abdulaziz are extremely bright and full of potential. The opportunities they’ve been given as a reward for their hard work will go a long way toward guiding them in their pursuit of science and medicine.”

-By Joshua Hammann
What can a bouncing basketball teach about physics? How does shopping with play money teach about math? Is there a correct way to take part in a debate, or a secret to staying calm during an interview?

These are just some of the questions explored during the annual Summer Enrichment Programs that allowed nearly 100 secondary students to explore their intellectual curiosity and learn from WCMC-Q faculty in a college setting.

“Alongside school visits and other public events, the summer programs are an integral part of WCMC-Q’s efforts to reach out to Qatari students and others from local schools. This is our third year offering the programs, and they have proved so popular that the size of this year’s programs was increased to help meet the interest from students in schools all across Qatar,” says Noha Saleh, director of student recruitment.

The Qatar Summer Math & Reading Talent Scholars Program kicked things off with students in grades 7-9 enjoying a week of brainteasers, field trips, and educational games to advance their math, reading, and writing skills.

Qatar Future Doctors helped students in grades 10-12 explore trends in medicine and public health in the Gulf region and learn basic life support training from the Qatar Red Crescent Society.

The Pre-College Enrichment Program helped participants learn to prepare for SAT exams and admissions interviews while workshops in career counseling and personal development helped them learn to translate their interests and strengths into a career.

“The goal of each program was to make the learning experience enjoyable. We had great students, and it was rewarding to see how much they took away from the programs,” says Dr. Aisha Al-Kubaisi, who coordinated the program with fellow Class of 2010 graduate Dr. Shalini Ravishankar.
About a third of adult patients at primary health care centers in Qatar have some form of mental illness, and outpatient visits to Hamad Hospital’s psychiatry unit have increased considerably in recent years.

Meanwhile, nearly half the population of Qatar believes mental illness could be a punishment from God and only one-third believes mentally ill patients can work in regular jobs.

Mental health issues such as these and the country’s resources for addressing them were among the topics discussed at a seminar at WCMC-Q Oct. 10 as health care organizations launched a weeklong awareness campaign in recognition of World Mental Health Day.

The prevalence of mental disorders in Qatar and the lack of understanding around mental illness were discussed by Dr. Suhaila Ghuloum, head of the psychiatry department at Hamad Medical Corporation, who has done research on the topic. “These attitudes raise concerns about the integration of patients with mental illness into the community,” says Dr. Ghuloum. “It also highlights the need for more awareness about mental illness in the country,” she says.

Treatments for mental illness have improved greatly in recent years, according to Dr. Mamoun Mobayed, consultant psychiatrist and director of the study and research department at the Social Rehabilitation Center in Doha. “Progress in treatment is guided by our growing body of constantly evolving knowledge,” says Dr. Mobayed.

Culture is a key issue in our understanding of mental health and illness, according to Dr. Hassen Al-Amin, associate professor of psychiatry at WCMC-Q and consultant psychiatrist at Hamad Medical Corporation. “People from different cultures have different ways of expressing themselves,” says Dr. Al-Amin. “For example, there is no word for depression in Arabic dialects or street language. Instead, people may say their head is hurting. Without understanding the culture and how people express themselves, the language may obscure diagnosis and complicate treatment.”

Family counselor Hadia Baker Abulaban discussed the effect of marital conflicts on children. Warm responsive care supports brain development in children, particularly the pathways determining emotion and social responsiveness in adulthood, she says. On the other hand, stressful or traumatic experiences undermine development and lower the threshold for activation of the stress response in later life. “It’s important to remember that it is not a problem to have a problem,” says Mrs. Abulaban. “Conflict handled well can be productive, leading to deeper understanding, mutual respect and closeness.”

The concept of shame as both a positive force for controlling behavior and a negative force for manipulating rules was discussed by Joan Lanning, Ph.D., director of the Employee Assistance Program at WCMC-Q. “There is a difference between guilt and shame,” says Dr. Lanning. “Guilt is an emotion that results from behaving in a manner contrary to our beliefs and values, while shame is a response to a personal failure relative to others’ expectations. Guilt encourages us to live within personal, family and cultural rules, while shame encourages us to manipulate those rules to make us feel good about ourselves.”

Sex, drugs, and lies as mental disorders were discussed by Dr. Nadir Elzain Omara, consultant psychiatrist at Al-Ahli Hospital in Doha. “Because psychosexual disorders, substance abuse, eating and personality disorders share some common origins, the principles of their management are almost identical,” says Dr. Omara. “But more importantly, they are viewed as a perversion of normal behavior, which can lead to prejudicial attitudes against individuals with any of these disorders,” he says. “Disapproving attitudes obscure our understanding of these disorders and may discourage people from seeking help.”

Addressing Mental Health Issues in Qatar
In honor of the Ramadan tradition of empathy and generosity for those less fortunate, the medical and premedical students visited Qatar’s Social Development Center (SDC) and hosted children from the Qatar’s orphan foundation, Dhreima.

The medical and premedical students helped pack bags of school supplies as gifts and visited the Social Development Center, an organization that raises funds for programs to assist and empower the less fortunate throughout Qatar.

For the children of Dhreima—a center for children from non-traditional homes—another group of WCMC-Q students helped organize an Iftar celebration in their honor. The children enjoyed good food and socializing with members of the WCMC-Q community.

“As our students learn to be outstanding doctors, these experiences help them to develop a sense of compassion and community service,” says Dr. Javidan Sheik, dean of WCMC-Q. “We are honored to fulfill our social responsibility through such highly regarded and effective organizations as Dhreima and the Social Development Center.”

“We are grateful to the students of WCMC-Q for working with us to draw awareness to our efforts to strengthen the community here in Doha,” says Amal Al Mannai, director of the Social Development Center. “The students of Education City are the leaders of tomorrow and their participation is a tremendous boost to our efforts.”

Khalid Kamal, director general of Dhreima Qatar Orphan Foundation, praised the social responsibility program at WCMC-Q, and expressed his gratitude to the medical college for including Dhreima in its local community outreach program this year.
Subhi Al Aref Named to WCMC Alumni Council

Subhi Al Aref, M.D., a graduate of WCMC-Q’s inaugural Class of 2008, has been appointed to a four-year term on the board of directors of the WCMC Alumni Association, the first appointment from the Qatar campus.

“I am honored to represent WCMC-Q at such a high level,” says Dr. Al Aref, who is currently senior resident in internal medicine at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, where he recently received an interventional cardiology fellowship.

“My most important goal is to increase the involvement of WCMC-Q graduates in the alumni association and help bridge the gaps between the New York and Doha campuses. Through the alumni association, I hope WCMC-Q graduates will stay in touch and help build a strong network to support our alma mater.”

The Weill Cornell Medical College Alumni Association was founded in 1904 and has more than 5,500 living alumni who help to enrich the student experience, life, and culture of Weill Cornell.

Imran Farooq Named Chief Resident, Wins Teaching Award

Imran Farooq, M.D., a graduate of the Class of 2009, was named chief resident of internal medicine at the Medical College of Virginia at Virginia Commonwealth University. “It’s a huge honor and a privilege,” says Dr. Farooq, who will be applying for a gastroenterology fellowship next year. “I’m excited to have a chief year before starting my fellowship training.” As an intern, Dr. Farooq was one of five out of the 500 in the entire residency program to receive the Gold Foundation award for excellence and humanism in teaching medicine. “Considering that I love teaching, I’m lucky to be recognized for it,” he says.

“Residency training has its ups and downs,” says Dr. Farooq. “Starting off as an intern, working 30 hours straight and then having 80 hour work weeks is a hard adjustment, initially. Learning a lot of medicine really quickly is the name of the game.”

He has been working on multiple abstracts for the American College of Physicians, and his gastroenterology research will be presented at Digestive Disease Week, a large gastroenterology conference in the U.S. “I’m grateful for my academic training and my interest in research, academics and clinical work provided through the triple mission of Weill Cornell.”

Through the alumni association, I hope WCMC-Q graduates will stay in touch and build a strong network.

Considering that I love teaching, I’m lucky to be recognized for it.
To Muhammed Al-Nufal, third-year medical student at WCMC-Q, December 2nd still feels like a dream. And it’s still hard for him to believe that his words would be among those of Qatar’s leadership in a bid they won that day to host the World Cup.

“The world’s media seemed to agree that Qatar’s final presentation was outstanding and may indeed have swayed the Executive Committee members who were undecided at that point, says Ali Willis, head of media at the office of Her Highness, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al Missned. “Muhammed’s role in presenting the voice of the youth of the region was critical.”

Al-Nufal, originally from Iraq, and many other students were asked to express their feelings about the Qatar and the bid. As he spoke with increasingly influential members of the bid, up to the CEO, Hassan Al-Thawadi, he and his story began to stand out. Yet until two days before a flight to Zurich, he had no idea that he would give a presentation to the world about why Qatar should become the first Arab nation in history to host the World Cup.

“We met with the CEO of the bid,” Al-Nufal said. “There were many students, but I remember at the end of the interview someone from the committee told me ‘you are an impressive guy.’”

Executives from the bid asked all students to speak from their hearts, Al-Nufal said. Having lost a father to warfare in Iraq, his message made a strong impression.

“I come from Iraq and I saw people fighting as violence spread quickly to everyone,” he says. “But when people played soccer, they were interested in something else. And when they reached the final [of the 2007 Asian Cup], and they won, on that day, everyone celebrated. No politics, and violence stopped in Iraq for weeks after this.”

“Words cannot describe how proud we are of Muhammed,” said Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q. “His story and his character are a symbol of the upcoming generation, and we are honored to be a part of his journey and the development of the best and brightest minds in the region.”

Having participated in three research projects and been listed as a co-investigator on one published, Al-Nufal’s work and achievements inside the college are an example of the intelligence, conviction and drive of students at WCMC-Q, Dr. Sheikh says. “This is only the beginning for Muhammed and his fellow students at WCMC-Q—it’s exciting to watch them stand out.”
How many times in the last month have you used the words brussel sprouts? And which words do you use most every day? The answers to these questions are key to designing useful English lessons, and about 200 local English teachers gathered for a day recently to explore ideas along these lines.

Many were newcomers and some were returning for the second annual English Teaching Excellence for Qatar (ETE-Q) event put on by WCMC-Q and Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar. This year’s ETE-Q 2010: Learning Through English event, held at CMU-Q, featured expert lectures, poster presentations and workshops designed to offer new perspectives on teaching English.

“ETE-Q is a good opportunity to meet teachers from other schools and to exchange ideas,” says Nigar Jafri, an English teacher at Rabaa Al-Adawiyya Secondary Independent School for Girls. “Further, ETE-Q is an excellent chance to know the latest trends in education, and the workshops are really useful.”

During her plenary speech, keynote speaker Deborah Short, director of Academic Language Research and Training, Inc., explored the concepts of academic word lists with high-usage vocabulary among other concepts that improve English comprehension among students.

By sharing techniques, instructors walk away with new and useful information about teaching English.

“Teachers in Qatar are eager to practice new, innovative English teaching methods,” says Alan Weber, writing professor at WCMC-Q and a main organizer of the ETE-Q events. “This event shares focused techniques, their demonstration and application, paying particular attention to oral language, reading and vocabulary development so that instructors walk away with new and useful information.”


Other workshops focused on writing assessment and high-priority vocabulary. Poster presentations, including Jafri’s on “Writing to Perfection,” covered a range of topics for teachers to take to their classrooms.

- By Emily Alp
When it comes to health care, young children are not just miniature adults. Their inability to communicate, their tendency to cry or be shy can challenge even the best pediatrician.

To help medical students learn how to work well with young patients, WCMC-Q faculty and staff members brought their children to the clinical skills center. The 20 youngsters, ranging in age from five months to six years, were examined briefly by medical students under the watchful eyes of a parent and a skilled pediatrician.

The examinations were part of the introductory clerkship course preparing students for clinical medicine, the hands-on treatment of patients that occupies most of the third and fourth years of the medical program as students rotate through different specialties.

“Our goal is to show students the best way to approach babies and young children,” says Amal Khidir, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics and director of the pediatric clerkship program, who organized the program.

The exams took place in the clinical skills center exam rooms, which are set up like regular clinic exam rooms. In each, a pediatrician modeled the correct way to approach a child, gave a brief demonstration of some parts of the physical exam, and then let students practice on the young volunteer. Generally, it involved listening to the child’s heart or lungs or touching the tummy under close supervision.

While most of the children seemed happy to participate, there were a few tears from some of the very youngest patients. Other children clung tightly to their parent, even during the exam. “That’s allowed in real examinations,” says Dr. Khidir. “We teach our students to be flexible as the pediatricians usually are, to accommodate the child’s behavior, to comfort them, and convince them to be examined.”

Shyness, even tears, were not a problem. “We want our students to get a real sense of working with children, so we told the parents not to worry about behavior,” says Dr. Khidir, who brought her children, Noon, age 5, and Mariam, age 3, to the exams.

Our goal is to model for students the best way to approach babies and young children.

The introductory clerkship course was launched four years ago, when the first class of medical students was getting ready for clinical rotations at Hamad Medical Corporation medical facilities in their third year.

Initially, the pediatrics part of the course was didactic instruction, or lectures, according to Dr. Khidir. “Then we started contacting faculty members personally to ask them to bring in their children, and we did demonstrations in a big lecture hall. We realized it was not interactive enough. Last year, we asked all the faculty and staff to let their young children participate. Parents brought in 15 children. This year, 20 children participated, and we gave the program a name, ‘Cornell Stars.’”

The demonstrations were conducted by WCMC-Q physicians Stephen Scott and Marcelina Mian and HMC physicians Sajjad Rahman, Magda Wagdy and Amal Haider. Hamad pediatric resident Laila Mahmoud also gave demonstrations to students.

“It’s a really positive program in many ways,” says Dr. Khidir. “It’s very helpful to the students, and it is another opportunity for collaboration between WCMC-Q and HMC. It gives a resident an opportunity to serve as a teacher, which is required by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education, and it lets family members participate in WCMC-Q’s education mission,” says Dr. Khidir. 

- By Kristina Goodnough
New Faculty

Dr. Alice Abdel-Aleem joined WCMC-Q as assistant research professor of neurology in August

She received an M.D. in human genetics from Ain-Shams University, Egypt, and has served as researcher in molecular human genetics, assistant professor of molecular human genetics, and professor of molecular human genetics in the medical molecular genetics department at the National Research Centre (NRC), Cairo, Egypt.

Dr. Abdel-Aleem was closely involved in the establishment of two new research centers in Egypt: a core molecular diagnostic and research laboratory at the National Institute of Neuromotor System for the Ministry of Health and the first human stem cell research unit at the NRC. She led diagnostics for the medical service unit of the NRC in several genetic diseases.

Dr. Moncef Ladjimi joined WCMC-Q as professor of biochemistry in August

He received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University Pierre and Marie Curie, Paris, France, and served at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris, France, in the laboratory of enzymology as assistant and associate professor of biochemistry before holding the academic rank of professor of biochemistry in the institution’s laboratory of biochemistry. He was research director in biochemistry and senior group leader on a project entitled “Protein Folding and Aggregation, Molecular Chaperones, and Neurodegenerative Disease” at CNRS.

Dr. Ladjimi was a member of the steering committee for French and Tunisian partnership in biotechnologies and protein engineering (1998-1999), and has been a reviewer and consultant to the Tunisian Ministry of Research and to various non-profit organizations in research and development, e.g. NATO, UNDP, since 2002. He has also been a member of the Research Evaluation Committees of the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) since 2004.

Dr. Rachid Bendriss joined WCMC-Q as a lecturer of English as a second language (ESL) in the premedical program in August

He received his Doctor of Education in educational leadership in 2007 from the University of Central Florida (UCF), and served as coordinator of academic support services and ESL Instructor, assistant director of intensive english program, assistant director of the International Services Center, and faculty development coordinator at UCF.

Dr. Ziyad Mahfoud joined WCMC-Q as associate professor of public health in September

Dr. Mahfoud served as assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Population Health at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. He received his B.S. and M.Sc. in mathematics from AUB and his Ph.D. in statistics (2001) from the University of Florida. He served as research assistant at the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida and as assistant professor in the Department of Statistics and School of Public Health of the University of Kentucky.

Dr. Mahfoud was instrumental in the revision of the Master’s of Public Health program at AUB and designed several biostatistics and elective courses. He served on several committees at AUB, including the Academic Curriculum Committee, the Learning Objectives Committee, the Teaching Public Health in the Faculty of Medicine Committee, the Institutional Review Board, and the University Disciplinary Committee.

Faculty Members Receive Promotions

Thurayya Arayssi, M.D., has been appointed associate dean for graduate medical education. In this role, Dr. Arayssi will create and implement a multi-year plan with our clinical affiliates Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Sidra Medical and Research Center to prepare for and successfully obtain ACGME approvals for residency training in multiple disciplines.

Dr. Arayssi received her M.D. from the American University of Beirut. She completed a residency in internal medicine at the University of Rochester and served as chief resident at Rochester General Hospital. She also completed a fellowship in rheumatology at the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.

Dr. Arayssi joined WCMC-Q from the American University of Beirut where she was very involved in curriculum development and teaching medical students, residents and fellows. While at AUB, Dr. Arayssi also served as assistant dean for graduate medical education to work on the organization of the residency programs, an effort that led to the development of the residency program at AUB that meets the full criteria for accreditation by ACGME.

Stephen Scott, M.D., M.P.H., has been appointed assistant dean for clinical curriculum and medical student education. He will oversee the development, implementation and management of the clinical curriculum at WCMC-Q as well as continue to oversee the academic advising and residency placement programs.

Dr. Scott received his M.D. from Baylor College of Medicine and completed his residency in family medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle. He completed a master’s degree in public health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

He joined WCMC-Q from Baylor College of Medicine where he provided full-spectrum outpatient and inpatient care for underserved patients and worked to develop and implement improved access to colon cancer screening services.
On Family Day in October, students’ families visit WCMC-Q’s clinical skills center with the medical mannequins used to practice exam techniques.

Faculty and staff take advantage of vision tests Aug. 29 as part of the Ramadan Health Campaign.

Professor Lord Ara Darzi of Imperial College London discusses quality, innovation, and health care reform at WCMC-Q Nov. 22 as part of Qatar Foundation’s Distinguished Lecture Series.
Faculty, staff and students join the Oct. 2 Think Pink Qatar 2010 Walk for Life along the Corniche to raise awareness of breast cancer.

Ahmad Al-Shahrani acts out Amadeo Avogadro’s discovery of the mole, a basic measuring unit in chemistry, as part of the annual Mole Day celebration by students in the Foundation Program.

Medical student Zahrae Sandouk discusses her summer research project with Dr. Ziad Kronfol during a poster presentation at the Nov. 6 research retreat.

WCMC-Q welcomes 80 youngsters from 20 different countries as part of the celebration of Arab Children’s Day sponsored by the League of Arab States.

Bowling is one of the ice-breaking activities offered to new premedical students during the orientation program.
Hard work can pay off in big ways. Three WCMC-Q students recently learned this first hand when their research on a genetic disorder in Qatar was accepted for presentation at a prestigious bioethics conference in Spain.

“[This study is important, and the idea for it came from the students],” says Dr. Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, M.D., Ph.D., J.D., associate professor of public health at WCMC-Q and faculty mentor for the study. “The students saw that people were staring at children with Down Syndrome and avoiding them in store checkout lines. And they said ‘wow, what is this? And have you noticed that you rarely see children with Down Syndrome in public?’”

Backed by funding from the Qatar National Research Fund’s Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP), second-year medical students Sanah Sadiq and Arnab Chowdhury and first-year medical student Abdulhadi Al Saei worked with Dr. Rodriguez del Pozo to develop a research study on the issue. They interviewed more than 50 families containing one member with Down Syndrome and 250 residents throughout Doha—sample sizes Dr. Rodriguez del Pozo says are ample to represent the population.

Their findings, which were presented in September at the V Summer Course on Bioethics Teaching and Research Methods at the University of Zaragoza in Spain, show that people in Qatar are generally aware of the cause of Down Syndrome. Yet the students also learned from their interviews that many believe those with the condition will misbehave and are unfit to lead independent lives.

“Awareness of different social factors related to Down Syndrome was way less than we expected,” says Al Saei. “Schools teach about this, but not enough.”

Dr. Rodriguez del Pozo says that the study’s findings illuminate ways that more education around Down Syndrome in Qatar could help integrate people with the condition into public life.

“Sometimes people disregard social studies thinking they are not medical studies,” he says. “I think that it’s important for faculty and students to remember that medicine is not only about molecules and cells but also about society and what’s going on ‘out there.’”

The student researchers all said they are inspired by their experience with social research and would like to participate in more studies in the future.

“I am really glad to have had this opportunity thanks to the UREP funding,” Sadiq says. “I got involved with people, worked with scientific data, and I feel like I’ve done something good.” (See related story on NPRP grants on p.5.)

In the end, Dr. Rodriguez del Pozo says research is about disseminating the results, and in that respect, the WCMC-Q student researchers made a strong and positive impression, internationally.

“We received lots of compliments—not just ‘good job,’ but more than a couple of times people presenting after us said ‘and this is what Pablo’s students were saying the other day.’”

- By Emily Alp
With so much information available online today, literature review is increasingly part of daily practice for doctors and scientists keen to stay abreast of the latest developments in their fields. To help them, Cornell librarians in Ithaca, New York City, and Doha recently secured access to one of the deepest, most trustworthy wells of medical information available online—198 years of the New England Journal of Medicine, dating back to January 1st, 1812. That's five months before Napoleon invaded Russia!

“The idea is to make sure that all Cornellians continuously have access to important information,” says Ellen Sayed, director of WCMC-Q's Distributed e-library.

The NEJM archive is robust—searchable PDFs with HTML and downloadable graphics available after 1945.

“An understanding of historical disease models and philosophies on the body and illness promotes big picture thinking,” says Alan Weber, Ph.D., a writing professor at WCMC-Q whose research involves history and social and cultural dimensions of science and medicine.

Historical information serves medical students and practitioners in a variety of ways, Weber explains. The ability to look at treatment trends related to specific symptoms is an obvious example, and keyword results produce these in the blink of a well-trained eye. Less obvious, yet equally important, reasons for digging into medical history involve ethics and exploring, through concrete journal examples, changes in thinking over the years.

For example, in a horrific medical study ending in the 1970s, U.S. Department of Health physicians prevented 400 black men in Alabama from obtaining proper treatment for syphilis in order to study the natural progression of this debilitating and sometimes fatal disease. Awareness of the historical and cultural conditions that produced this ethical lapse helps ensure that history does not repeat itself, Weber says.

“The way doctors conceptualize disease has a great impact on their clinical practice,” he says. “In previous times, disease was seen as a punishment for sin. Even today, if a practitioner believes there is a moral foundation for a patient’s disease, even in the back of his or her mind, it can impact care. We see it happening even now—patients getting unfairly bumped down on transplant lists for social or economic reasons, etc. It’s a difficult issue with a lot of factors to weigh.”

Investigators need significantly less time to conduct background and design studies when full-text resources are at their fingertips, Sayed says. Additionally, research designs supported by thorough background study are built on a much broader understanding of the research field—what has been tried, gaps in knowledge.

In medical research, the availability of online journal resources has a direct impact on investigators’ productivity, says Sayed. “Studies show a direct relationship between an organization’s published papers and its investment in online resources.”

- By Emily Alp
Searching for Signs of Life in Qatar’s Sand Dunes

Qatar’s massive shifting sand dunes appear to contain biological organisms that help hold the sand together.

The organisms may have the potential to stabilize the dunes and reverse or reduce desertification that harms agriculture and development in Qatar and other hyper-arid desert areas.

The possibility is being studied by researchers at WCMC-Q and Cornell University who received a $1 million grant from the Qatar National Research Fund to explore moisture dynamics and microbial activity in the dunes. (See story on NPRP grants on p.5.) Currently arid regions make up about 41 percent of the earth’s land area and desertification puts two billion of the world’s poorest people at risk by threatening agriculture, infrastructure, and life expectancy.

“For years, people thought nothing could live in the sand dunes,” says Renee Richer, Ph.D., visiting professor of biology at WCMC-Q and one of the researchers involved in the study. “Recently, researchers have found evidence of bacteria in the dunes, thanks to modern techniques such as genomic analysis that can detect the presence of DNA.”

Richer and WCMC-Q biology lecturer Christopher Ogden, Ph.D., are working with Cornell colleagues Michel Louge, Ph.D., professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, who has done extensive research on the dunes in North Africa, and Anthony Hay, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology.

In a pilot study last year, Richer and Louge tested the moisture in some of Qatar’s sand dunes and collected samples. “We found evidence of bacteria,” says Richer. She suspects the evidence may point to the presence of cyanobacteria, which are among the oldest known organisms. “They secrete a sugar coat that holds onto water and other grains of sand and creates a sort of crust that stabilizes part of the dune,” says Richer.

“Based on what we know about biology and water dynamics, it makes sense to us that these cyanobacteria should be living in the dunes,” says Ogden, who will measure moisture levels and investigate how rainwater permeates the dunes.

As part of the study, researchers will chart the activity of the microbial community below the dune surface, exploring its role in moisture retention, cohesion, erodability and permeability of sands beneath the surface. They will also investigate how fluid mechanics and rippling sand affect the dune’s moisture cycle.

-By Kristina Goodnough

Accommodating Muslim Sensitivities

Basic Islamic medical ethics and Muslim sensitivities within the health care system are discussed in a recent study by Aasim Padela, M.D., of the University of Michigan and Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, M.D., Ph.D., J.D., of WCMC-Q.

The article, “Muslim patients and cross-gender interactions in medicine: an Islamic bioethical perspective,” provides guidance to health care workers in hospitals serving observant Muslim patients. It was published in October in the Journal of Medical Ethics.

“The overarching Islamic ethic pertaining to cross-gender interaction is maintaining modesty,” say Drs. Padela and Rodriguez del Pozo in their paper.

“Given the Islamic ethics concerning cross-gender interaction one can understand how the medical arena may be uncomfortable for some Muslims. The challenge for providers is to understand and recognize when Islamic conceptions of modesty might make patients reticent to change their dress, to expose parts of their body, to be physically examined, or to be alone with a member of the opposite sex.

“As providers we have to be cautious not to stereotype patients but on the other hand must create the space for patients to relay concerns, preferences and values. Thus for patients who appear to be Muslim one could easily offer the comment ‘I know some people are very anxious about being examined or taken care of by someone who is not of their gender. Do you have any concerns you want to share with me?’ This could be followed up by asking, ‘Is there anything you want me to do differently or be cautious about during the physical exam?’”

-By Kristina Goodnough
The focus was on research as WCMC-Q held its first annual research retreat Nov. 6, a day-long, off-campus event at the Diplomatic Club in Doha. More than a dozen faculty members and post-doctoral fellows provided a brief glimpse of their research during short oral presentations throughout the day. The event also included posters by more than 40 students, highlighting their participation in summer research programs under faculty supervision at Cornell campuses in Ithaca, New York City or Doha.

“I really believe what we are doing here is historic,” says Khaled Machaca, Ph.D., associate dean for research. “This is practically the first program at this level of production and science in the region.”

The biomedical research program, which was established two years ago, has 58 published papers to its credit in important international journals such as the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and the Journal of Cell Biology.

“Publication of papers is the first phase of productivity. We are looking forward to the next phase, which will be patents, and then, to the commercialization of our science,” says Dr. Machaca. “Our productivity is based on two things: the quality of our principal investigators and post-doctoral fellows and strong support from Qatar Foundation.”

Some of the research topics discussed include:

- epidemiology of infectious diseases by Laith Abu-Raddad, Ph.D.
- multilingual, multicultural patient survey design by Amal Khidir, M.D.
- schizophrenia and neurobiology of pain by Hassen Al-Amin, M.D.
- endothelial dysfunction in diabetes by Hong Ding, M.D., Ph.D.