

First Annual Report

July 2011 – August 2012



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the ongoing efforts, services and contributions of King Abdullah Bin Aziz, Al Saud, His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, Dr. Ziad A. Memish, Dr. Scott J.N. McNabb and his staff, the staff of Ministry of Health of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, Emory University, and the 2011 Fellows for making this fellowship program successful.

We would also like to offer our special thanks for the hard work and support provided by Dr. Ziad A. Memish, Dr. Abdullah Assiri, Dr. James Curran and Dr. Carlos Del Rio to further extend this fellowship program for next two years in the Department of Global Health.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has made significant efforts to strengthen its healthcare infrastructure. The Kingdom faces issues related to both infectious diseases (e.g., dengue, tuberculosis, hepatitis) and chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, obesity), and public health institutions and health professionals play a critical role in combatting these diseases.

Following King Abdullah's awarding of funding to build human capacity in the Kingdom, His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeh, Minister of Health, signed a Letter of Engagement with the Dean of the Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH), Dr. James Curran, on May 25, 2010. The Letter established the King Abdullah Fellowship Program (KAFP) which includes several areas of mutually beneficial scientific collaboration, which include exchange of students and collaborative faculty research.

Program Objective

The primary objectives of the King Abdullah Fellowship Program are to:

- Strengthen public health human capacity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
- Promote bilateral exchange of students and researchers; and
- Engage in collaborative research activities.

2011 ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

2011 KAFP Fellows

In the "Scholar and Learner Exchange" section of the May 25, 2010 Executive Agreement, a vigorous plan was developed to recruit the most suitable candidates for the King Abdullah Fellowship Program. Dr. Scott McNabb visited the Ministry of Health (MoH) in January and February 2011 to conduct in-person interviews of the eight candidates who had applied for the program and enrolled in the Hubert Department of Global Health (HDGH) in Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) at Emory University. These eight students were nominated by Dr. McNabb to the chair of the HDGH Admissions Committee in March 2011. In June 2011, the eight candidates were invited to the MoH for a comprehensive, four-week English and scientific writing course as preparation for their academic coursework at Emory University.

The first year of Fellows and their families arrived in Atlanta at the beginning of June. They received administrative and support services from the KAFP staff, including assistance related to transportation, housing, and enrolling children in school, as well as orientation to the Atlanta Muslim community and provision of English as a Second Language instruction. The students took classes at RSPH for one year and performed MPH thesis-level research in the Kingdom in the summer between their first and second years. The topics of the research projects were determined in collaboration with Dr. Memish, and both he and Dr. McNabb (among other Emory faculty) have been mentoring the students throughout their thesis work.

Collaborative Faculty Research

The KAFP has generated several research proposals for prospective theses and organized meetings to identify and establish communication among stakeholders (students, RSPH faculty and KSA counterparts) on public health topics in the KSA, such as diabetes, tobacco, hepatitis, immunizable diseases, and tuberculosis. Opportunities now exist for RSPH faculty to develop collaborative research or spend extended periods of time in the KSA performing program assessments.

Specific Activities

- October – December 2010: Cohort of up to 10 (eight from the MoH and two from the National Guard) recruited and interviewed; applications to Emory University completed
- March 2011: Cohort of eight accepted into the global health department, RSPH
- April 2011: Cohort of eight pre-enrolled
- March – August 2011: Administrative support provided before Fellow's arrival to Emory
- June 2011: English course provided
- July – August 2011: Cohort of six students arrived in Atlanta
- August 2011: Cohort began studies
- August 2011 – September 2011: English and biostatistics instructional support provided to students
- April 2012: Thesis topics chosen
- May 2012: Students returned to Kingdom to work on practicum/thesis projects
- August 2012: Students will return to Emory for fall (third) semester
- September 2012: Thesis writing will begin
- April 2013: Approval of thesis
- May 2013: Graduation

Programmatic Support

Dr. McNabb serves as the academic advisor for all of the 2011 Fellows. From the time they arrived, the Fellows and their families have been provided social and academic support so that they can adjust to their lives at Emory University and in Atlanta, including:

- Weekly meeting with Dr. McNabb to discuss academic and social issues;
- Assistance with enrolling children in the Islamic School of Atlanta;
- English language instruction and support;
- Meetings with faculty;
- Biostatistics, epidemiology and data analysis instruction and support;
- Tickets to Six Flags of Georgia, World of Coca Cola, Atlanta Aquarium, Disneyland of Florida;
- Support for transportation for a Fellow's spouse to attend ESL classes;
- Transportation during transition period and for vacations outside of Georgia.

Success Stories

Although most of the students were coming to US for the first time, they proved to be up to the challenge. The Fellows studied hard and attained high GPAs in their courses in the fall semester. Osama Mohammed Alwafi scored the highest GPA: a 4.0. During the spring 2012 semester, Mr. Alwafi did particularly well in the Evidence-based Strategic Planning class and received recognition by the professor, Dr. Stanley Foster, for an excellent presentation, which he was subsequently asked to present to the entire class.

In December, the Fellows had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, t h e Minister of Health in Atlanta. The group was recognized as an important addition to the Rollins' international community and to the general student population of Emory University. In addition, a feature story about one of the Fellows, Fatima Younis Alslail, entitled A Public Health Transformation from 7,000 miles Away was featured on Emory's webpage.

Collaborative Faculty Research

The KAFP has generated several research proposals for prospective theses and has organized meetings to identify and establish communication among stakeholders (students, RSPH faculty, and KSA counterparts) on public health topics such as diabetes, tobacco, hepatitis, immunizable diseases, and tuberculosis in the Kingdom. To strengthen the collaborative research work, Dr. Abdullah Assiri has received the position of Adjunct Faculty in the Department of Global Health at Emory University.

Communication Material and Resources

In order to promote the activities of King Abdullah Fellowship Program, several communication materials have been developed, including:

KAFP Program Presentation: http://prezi.com/pop9-nppnybh/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share

KAFP Website: <http://kingabdullahfellowship.com/>

KAFP Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KAFPMEMORY>

Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/King-Abdullah-Fellowship-Program/311865918868352>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/king-abdullah-fellowship/56/231/44>

In addition, RSPH staff developed the Guide for King Abdullah Fellows, a comprehensive guide detailing all of the information Fellows need to successfully participate in the program.

2012 ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

Student Research Projects in the KSA

In May 2012, four RSPH students traveled to Riyadh on a Global Field Experience (GFE) to work on diabetes and smoking control, antimicrobial resistance and hepatitis projects, in collaboration with their Saudi counterparts.

Likewise, the six 2011 KAFP students travelled to Kingdom to complete their practicum work on specific projects and prospective theses as part of degree requirements. The students were provided support and guidance in this process, as well as the opportunity to select their thesis advisors from among the Emory faculty. Dr. Scott McNabb is advising four of the Fellows, while other faculty members from the global health department are advising the other two Fellows.

2012 KAFP Cohort

In December 2011, Dr. Al-Rabeeah requested that Dr. Curran expand the program by allowing additional scholars to matriculate in the Department of Health Policy and Management (HPM). Over 80 persons applied for acceptance into the 2012 KAFP cohort, and in collaboration with the MoH, interviews were conducted with 61 applicants who met MoH criteria. Four Fellows were chosen for the HDGH and six for the HPM department.

ESL Support

High-level English language skills are essential for the success of international students in a US academic institution. Therefore, to provide English language support to the cohort of 2012, arrangements were made to send an ESL teacher to the KSA to provide academic English instruction. In June 2012, with support from the MoH, Holly Patrick, the ESL Instructor for RSPH, traveled to Riyadh to give four weeks of classes to the 2012 Fellows to strengthen their English language and academic writing skills.

CONCLUSION

The King Abdullah Fellowship Program is proving to be quite a success due to efforts by the Fellows and the program directors and staff, as well as the commitment and ongoing support of the MoH, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission and Emory University.

Lessons Learned

From our experience of the first year of the KAFP, we noted the following issues to be addressed:

1. The candidates did not have sufficient information about the application process for the MOH nor the application requirements for Emory University.
2. The candidates applied at the MOH without preparing for or taking the GRE and TOEFL tests, which are requirements for application to Emory University.
3. The candidates were not able to write an effective and persuasive Statement of Intent, which is also an integral part of the application to Emory.
4. The candidates need to have strong English language skills in order to succeed in their academic work and daily life in the US.
5. A communication gap exists between the ministries of KSA, which resulted in the delay of the release of papers and the students' arrival in the US.
6. The current King Abdullah Fellows should establish strong communication with prospective students to guide them about the application process for the Program.

Recommendations

- GRE and TOEFL scores should be considered in the MoH screening process.
- The KAFP and MoH should utilize various communication resources developed by the Fellowship program staff at Emory University, including the KAFP Guide, website and Facebook page.
- To strengthen coordination of the program's recruitment and application process, a KAFP Committee – led by Dr. McNabb and comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Civil Service – should be formed to coordinate all of the interrelated processes involved in the program, including but not limited to: recruitment and selection of participants; documentation procedures; and immigration processes and travel arrangements. The committee should meet on a regular basis throughout the year to oversee and facilitate these activities and ensure that program related procedures are executed in an efficient and timely manner.
- To ensure that the recruitment process takes place well in advance of application deadlines, the program should be continuously promoted throughout the year via ministry websites and published materials. English proficiency, GRE/TOEFL tests, and other Emory and program application requirements and deadlines should be included in all promotional materials to ensure recruitment of qualified candidates.

- The following schedule/deadlines are recommended:
 - a. MoH Application Deadline (including scores from GRE and TOEFL): August 15
 - b. Interviews: September 1-15
 - c. Fellowship Acceptance Decision Deadline: October 1
 - d. Emory Application Preparation (Riyadh): One week in November
 - e. Completed Emory Application (via SOPHAS): January 1
 - f. Emory Acceptance Decision Deadline: February 1
 - g. Financial Guarantee Letter Deadline: March 1
 - h. Documents for I-20 Received by Emory: March 30
 - i. I-20 Issued by Emory: April 1
 - j. Visa Documents Submission Deadline: April 15
 - k. Airline Ticket and Apartment Rental Reservations (by KAFP) Deadline: May 1
 - l. Ministry of Civil Service Release Issued: June 1
 - m. Pre-Orientation (Riyadh): Three weeks in July
 - n. Arrival to the US: First week of August
 - o. Students Attend RIO: Mid-August

- To ensure effective and efficient communication with prospective Fellows during the entire process prior to their arrival in the US, ongoing meetings should take place with Dr. McNabb via GoToMeeting initially on a monthly basis (from January to April) and later on a bi-weekly basis (from May to July). A formal agenda should be developed and presented for each meeting that includes review of one section of the KAFP Guide (e.g., housing, transportation) with the participants to ensure they are informed about all aspects of the transition to living in the US, studying at RSHP and participating in the program.

- A 3-week pre-orientation session should be held in the KSA in the month of July each year to strengthen the Fellows' English and academic skills and review with them pertinent information found in the KAFP Guide (e.g., housing, transportation).

- In order to establish clear expectations and improve the quality and efficiency of program services given existing resources, a list of all transition services (eg., airport pickup, temporary housing arrangements) provided by the KAFP, as well as a schedule for provision of these services by KAFP staff, should be included in the agreement between the KAFP and the Ministry of Health. The list of services provided and the schedule for those services should be clearly communicated clearly to prospective Fellows before their arrival in the US during bi-weekly meetings and during the Pre-Orientation session.

- The KAFP should provide airport service to all Fellows who arrive in the US within a specified 3-day period at the beginning of August. Fellows who choose to arrive at any other time will not receive airport pickup service.

The KAFP should hire a professional driver and bus service to pick up the Fellows and their families during the 3-day airport arrival period. Car seats must be made available for the children.

- Rooms should be reserved at the Emory Conference Center and/or Villa International for 1-3 nights for all of the Fellows and their families upon arrival in the US. The program will be responsible for the cost of this housing at those two locations; Fellows who choose to stay elsewhere will be required to pay for those hotel costs.
- During the first year of their participation in the KAFP, Fellows will be given the choice of renting apartments in either the Campus Crossing, Gables at Emory Point, or Highland Lake apartment complexes. The KAFP will reserve apartments for the Fellows in these three locations prior to their arrival in the US. As per the agreement with the Ministry of Health, the KAFP will cover the cost of housing only at these three locations; Fellows who choose to rent an apartment elsewhere will be required to pay housing costs.
- The KAFP will assist Fellows in renting cars during the first 2 days of their arrival and will pay car rental fees for up to 5 days. Prior to car rental, transportation will be offered to assist Fellows in purchasing personal items, groceries and furniture, enrolling their family members in school, as well as activating utilities and obtaining documents at the Social Security office. For Fellows who are unable to drive (e.g., female Fellows), transportation will be provided for up to 5 days. All temporary transportation services will be offered in accordance with the transition services schedule, to be given to Fellows upon arrival.
- Fellows who are unable to successfully enroll in health insurance coverage from SACM prior to arriving in the US will participate in an enrollment instruction session led by KAFP staff with assistance from Second Year Program Fellows.

Deadlines

Tasks	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Advertisement by MoH	Before Aug 1											
Recruitment of Students from MoH	x	x	x									
GRE, TOEFL/IELTS test completion	x	x	x	x								
Start SOPHAS application		x	x	x								
Submit SOPHAS application					x	Jan 31						
Interview with Dr. McNabb					x	x						
Deadline for RSPH Consideration							x	Mar 15				
Financial guarantee letter from MoH								x				
RSPH should receive all I-20 documents								Mar 31				
I-20 issued by RSPH								x	x			
Begin visa application									x	x		
Release from Ministry of Civil Services and ticket reservation											Jan 31	
Arrival to Atlanta for ESL classes											Jul 10	