Beirut - the new home of Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative – GESI.

Today sees the launch of a new secretariat at the American University of Beirut for the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI), an international consortium established to enhance the capacity for research synthesis worldwide.

Research synthesis helps people make better decisions about public policies and public service delivery questions, globally. It helps to identify, critically appraise and synthesize different types of available evidence on a particular topic. It identifies policies and interventions that work for groups of people, under particularly circumstances and contexts, and over a period of time.

In response to the identification of major gaps in synthesized evidence for priority questions related to low and middle income countries (LMICs), the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) was launched in May 2015, hosted by the Center for Systematic Reviews on Health Policy and Systems Research (SPARK) at the American University of Beirut. The goal of the GESI Consortium is to increase the capacity to undertake research syntheses by establishing and supporting an initial ten Centres for Research Synthesis in LMICs.

GESI is made up of leading international organizations in evidence synthesis including Cochrane, a global independent network of researchers, professionals, patients, carers and people interested in health, the Campbell Collaboration, the EPPI-Centre, 3ie, the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, housed by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Joanna Briggs Institute.

GESI's Governance Group has decided to establish a Secretariat to help support and sustain its work, and saw it as important that this Secretariat was based in a LMIC. The role of the Secretariat is to co-ordinate and follow up on all GESI-related projects and funding initiatives, including the work of the Centers for Research for Synthesis. The Secretariat’s tasks also include ensuring the exchange of information within the Centers and between the Centers and Governance Group, assessing the baseline needs of the Centers based on GESI’s vision, and supporting planning of activities for capacity building in the GESI Centers.

Following a competitive process, the Governance Group selected the Center for Systematic Reviews on Health Policy and Systems Research (SPARK) at the American University of Beirut to host the General Secretariat for the GESI.

SPARK has selected Dr. Tamara Lotfi to lead the Secretariat. Dr. Lotfi trained in medicine and public health and has collaborated with the Clinical Research Institute and the SPARK Center for the last two years. During this time she has led and conducted many systematic reviews and overview of reviews, and has participated in facilitating workshops and contributed to several capacity building activities.
Co-directors of SPARK, Drs. Elie Akl and Fadi El-Jardali, affirm that hosting GESI secretariat will help scale up efforts to promote evidence-informed policymaking and practice in low and middle-income countries.

“The establishment of a Secretariat at the American University of Beirut is an exciting development in GESI’s global work. It emphasizes the importance of producing systematic reviews in health policy and systems research that are responsive to the needs and priorities of policymakers and stakeholders. It also contributes to the much needed capacity building in this field” explains Akl. “We are passionate about leading and supporting policy-relevant reviews, and we believe that by hosting this new secretariat, it will enable us to share expertise and knowledge in order to create impact at a local, regional and international level” adds El-Jardali.

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Editor’s Notes

About SPARK: The Center for Systematic Reviews on Health Policy and Systems Research, SPARK was established in 2013 through funding from the Alliance for Health Systems and Policy Research.

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About Cochrane:

Cochrane is a global independent network of researchers, professionals, patients, carers and people interested in health.

Cochrane produces reviews which study all of the best available evidence generated through research and make it easier to inform decisions about health. These are called systematic reviews.

Cochrane is a not-for profit organisation with collaborators from more than 120 countries working together to produce credible, accessible health information that is free from commercial sponsorship and other conflicts of interest. Our work is recognised as representing an international gold standard for high quality, trusted information.