

ASSEMBLY HONOURS CONTRIBUTIONS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND AWARDS THE WINNERS OF THE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH CONTEST

Assembly honours contributions to public health and awards the winners of the school mental health contest

The 54th World Health Assembly today awarded a number of prizes to those who have made significant contributions to the development of public health in different countries and regions. The prizes were presented to the laureates by Dr Hong Sun Huot, President of the 54th WHA.

The **Léon Bernard Foundation Prize** is awarded to a person who has made a significant contribution to the development of social medicine. The 2001 Prize and Medal recipient is Dr Sastri Saowakontha of Thailand. For almost 40 years, Dr Saowakontha has taught and researched in a number of fields, including parasitology, nutrition and vitamin deficiency, and the nutritional status of children and women of childbearing age in Thailand.

The **Jacques Parisot Foundation Fellowship** is awarded this year to Dr Laura Papantoniou from Cyprus. Dr Papantoniou is a member of the public health team of the Department of Medical and Public Health Services. Her research project is "Study of the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to AIDS, sex and sexually transmitted diseases among the adult population of the town of Limassol and rural areas of Cyprus." It aims to obtain quantifiable data on the profile of individuals who engage in risky behaviours in relation to sexual transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and to evaluate prevention indicators of the national AIDS programme.

The **Ishan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize** is awarded every two years and recognizes significant achievements in the field of family health. This year's prize and Medal goes to Professor Mahmoud Fathalla from Egypt. Professor Fathalla currently holds the post of Professor for Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Assiut University (Egypt). He is well known nationally and internationally for his contribution to family and reproductive health, focusing especially on avoidable maternal mortality.

The **Sasakawa Health Prize** is awarded to individuals, institutions or non-governmental organizations, which have accomplished outstanding innovative work in health development, such as the promotion of given health programmes or achievements in primary health care. The 2001 prize goes to Dr João Aprigio Guerra de Almeida of Brazil. Dr Guerra de Almeida has made a major contribution to the development of breast-feeding services and policies in Brazil. Over the past 14 years he has been personally involved in the establishment and development of a network of human milk banks throughout Brazil. This programme has resulted in a considerable increase in the practice of breast-feeding over the past 10 years, thus reversing the dangerous downward trend observed in previous decades.

The **United Arab Emirates Health Foundation Prize** is awarded to individuals, institutions or organizations who have made an outstanding contribution to health development. This year's prize is awarded jointly to Dr A.J. Mohammad Suleiman (Oman) and the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC). Over the past ten years, Dr Suleiman has been personally involved in several projects dealing with health education, immunization, eradication of poliomyelitis and surveillance and prevention of communicable and noncommunicable diseases. He has been very active in the Expanded Programme on Immunization that has resulted in a 99% coverage of children under the age of one in Oman, for all six vaccine-preventable diseases. Moreover, no cases of polio have been reported in Oman since 1993.

UPMRC was founded in 1979 by a group of Palestinian doctors and professionals to provide health care to communities deprived of essential services. Over the years, it has expanded to include some 1200 physicians, nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacists and other health professionals, most of whom are volunteers. They now provide comprehensive and affordable primary care services to underprivileged Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem.

The **Francesco Pocchiari Fellowship** is awarded every two years. It consists of one or two travelling fellowships to enable young researchers to visit other countries in order to obtain new experience relevant to their own research and public health priorities in their own countries. This prize is awarded to Dr Tay Sun Tee from Malaysia. Dr Tay is currently working as Research Officer at the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur, where she carries out research in the epidemiology and control of rickettsial infections. Her interest is in recombinant monoclonal antibody technology and new vaccines. Her objectives during the fellowship include acquiring new knowledge, technical experience and practical skills which she can use in her research, training and teaching activities in Malaysia.

During the same ceremony, WHO gave awards to the winners of the **WHO Global School Contest**, held in conjunction with World Health Day on 7 April whose theme was Mental Health. The global winners are:

- Mr Dhruv Suri, age 7, New Delhi, India, winner of the Drawing Contest for ages 6-9;
- Ms Tang Shu-wei, age 14, Guangdong Province, China, winner of the 250-word essay contest for ages 10-14;
- Ms Bibbie Kumangai, age 17, Palau, winner of the 500-word essay contest for ages 15-18.

Entries were received from more than 60 countries around the world, with an estimated participation of around 500 000 students. Through this contest WHO intended to provide children with a better appreciation of mental health and to encourage schools to reinforce or initiate efforts to promote mental health education in the school health curriculum. About one in five of the world's youth under the age of 15 suffer from mild to severe mental disorders. But most treatments are geared towards adults, despite the need for early intervention in childhood.

For further information, please contact Ms Melinda Henry, Spokesperson's Office, WHO, Geneva. Tel.: (+41 22) 917 6894 (through 22 May) and (+41 22) 791 2535 (thereafter). Fax: (+41 22) 791 4858; E-mail: henrym@who.int. All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on the subject, can be obtained on the WHO web site: www.who.int