

Doctors Against FGC initiative launched in Egypt

Physicians persuade physicians, backed by new Minister

Menoufiya, Egypt, May 4, 2009 – Egypt’s medical profession is leading the next phase of the country’s campaign to end the harmful custom of female genital-cutting, or FGC. Health providers and officials on May 4 announced the launch of the initiative “Doctors Against FGC” under which doctors lead awareness-raising sessions for other doctors throughout Egypt to encourage them to refuse parents’ requests to perform the procedure upon their daughters.



Moushira Khattab, Egypt’s Minister of State for Family and Population, announces “Doctors Against FGC”.

The initiative enjoys the strong support of Moushira Khattab, Egypt’s newly appointed Minister of State for Family and Population and a longtime champion of women’s rights. Minister Khattab helped launch the initiative at a conference of 250 doctors, nurses, outreach workers, national officials and community leaders in her native Menoufiya Governorate in the rural Nile Delta. “The family might not have the knowledge, but for the doctor, there is no excuse,” Khattab said. “Doctors know about the harm they are inflicting upon young girls for nothing except gaining money. ... When a mother asks a doctor to do it, he has a responsibility to convince them: ‘Go home. Don’t do it.’”

Egypt has raised awareness of the dangerous health complications that result from FGC, but many families reacted by paying for their daughters to undergo the procedure in medical facilities which they consider safer. A 2005 survey found 75 percent of FGC was performed by trained medical personnel, with the rest performed by untrained persons such as barbers and midwives in less hygienic settings. In any setting, FGC permanently damages sensation and can cause chronic problems of the urinary tract, reproduction and childbirth, along with potential psychological harm.

Under Doctors Against FGC, the Government of Egypt informs doctors and medical students about multiple dimensions of FGC – health, legal, religious, social and demographic. A cadre of doctors is being trained to act as “master trainers” holding awareness-raising sessions for other doctors throughout Egypt in 24 governorates. Seminars are being held at medical schools for final-year students, and the Ministry of Health added a unit on FGC to the pre-service training for new medical-school graduates. The activities were designed by Egypt’s Ministry of Health, the National Council for Childhood & Motherhood in the Ministry of State for Family and Population, UNICEF, and the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Communication for Healthy Living project (CHL) with technical assistance from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs.

“From Menoufiya, we announce it strongly: We will not be the cause of the continuation of this injurious practice in Egypt,” said Dr. Mohamed Farid, a gynecologist and CHL trainer. “We still stand as one hand to do our duty for health awareness for our community, namely to protect the health of Egyptian citizens from this harmful traditional practice. We will not keep silent in front of our colleagues who are the cause of this unfair stain.”