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## Lack of research into precision medicine may hinder targeted therapies for cancers in the UAE



- *Experts highlight that Middle Eastern populations are underrepresented in disease research*
- *UAE Vision 2021 aims to reduce cancer-related deaths, which WHO estimated to be 25.6 deaths per 100,000 population in the UAE in 2017*
- *Barriers to providing precision medicine in the Arab world to be discussed at MEDLAB Congress taking place from 4 - 7 February 2019 in Dubai*

Ahead of the upcoming [MEDLAB Exhibition & Congress](#), the MENA region's largest medical laboratory event, experts are highlighting the need for advancing genetic and disease research in the Arab world in order to provide targeted gene therapies for certain cancers for citizens in the UAE.

This is in line with the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda, which aims to reduce cancer-related deaths in the country, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimating 25.6 deaths per 100,000 population in the UAE in 2017. To achieve this aim, the UAE government regularly launches national awareness and preventative campaigns within the framework of 'Itmenan' which involves the 'Universal Periodic Examination' and 'Early Detection of Cancer' initiatives adopted by the Council of Ministers.

Targeted therapies, or precision medicine, is defined as tailoring of medical treatment to the individual characteristics of each patient. It is an emerging approach for disease treatment and prevention that takes into account individual variability in genes, environment, and lifestyle for each person. For example, for cancer treatments, based on genetic testing, a physician can choose the most effective chemotherapy based on the mutation or biomarker identified.

According to the WHO, while 70% of deaths from cancer occur in low and middle-income countries, only one in five low and middle-income countries have the necessary data to drive cancer policy. More than 90% of high-income countries reported available treatment services compared to less than 30% in low-income countries. While a portion of countries in MENA do have a high GDP, they are still considered developing economies according to the United Nations.

Commenting, Dr Sara Sorrell, Consultant Family Medicine, Intercare Health Center, Abu Dhabi, UAE, said: "It is well recognised that Middle Eastern populations are underrepresented in disease research and, to date, there is no research to indicate the impact of precision medicine in the UAE. But I think that this is still premature as we don't even have enough data on the general population genetics of this part of the world, so this is really the first step.

"For instance, if a different mutation is found to cause a particular cancer here, compared to European descent populations, this may present a novel target for new cancer therapies for local populations. Or, if a new drug comes on the market, what's the effect in the local population? Therefore, advancing genetic and disease research in the UAE and the Arab world is very important. For this to occur, there needs to be both a focus on funding research as well as formulating policies around research and healthcare innovation to protect patients, scientists, and physicians," she added.

Molecular diagnostics and genetics experts from the MENA region will gather at the upcoming MEDLAB Congress taking place from 4 - 7 February 2019 at Dubai World Trade Centre to discuss topics such as barriers to providing precision medicine in the Arab World, strategies for the prevention of genetic diseases, and Next-Generation Sequencing in oncology, among others.

Commenting on the importance of scientific exchange in the regional medical laboratory industry, Rejoy Penacerrada, Conference Director, MEDLAB Congress, said: "The conferences provide an important platform for the region's medical laboratory community to engage in discussion that will promote the role of genetic and population research in advancing the health of citizens across the region. This is led by the intense interest in precision medicine, with the region's laboratories now actively expanding their test menus for more personalised diagnostic services."

Organised by Informa Exhibitions, the MEDLAB Congress brings together more than 6,700 conference delegates to hear from more than 110 speakers from 20 countries in an effort to provide advanced medical laboratory techniques for better health.

**For a closer look at MEDLAB 2019, please visit [www.medlabme.com](http://www.medlabme.com)**

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