

Message from the Editor

Assalaamu alaykum

Dear IMANA Members and JIMA Readers:

This issue of JIMA celebrates the 41st annual conference and the 9th international conference of IMANA, which will be held for the first time in Morocco, an exciting Arab country with a varied geography and remarkable history. The scientific program and the submitted abstracts are published. In sha Allah, it will be a memorable conference.

In this issue, we publish a very comprehensive scientific article about the ENCODE Project, which complements the human genome project in elucidating the bases of human genetics and diseases. It seeks to map the arrays of DNA sequence elements, including genes, their promoters and enhancers, repressors and silencers, exons, and RNA transcripts. Its goal is to identify single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP) variants in the DNA that are more frequent in patients with common multifactorial diseases and therefore serve as markers for susceptibility. Those individuals identified as susceptible may then modify their lifestyle to decrease their chances of developing the diseases. Further prospects of this project are discussed.

Last month, the Noor conference was held in al-Madina al-Munawwara, Saudi Arabia. This conference was organized by the Knowledge Economic City. The groundwork of the conference was laid by our late IMANA member, Dr. M.A.A. Khan, in a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in April 2007.¹ The effort was continued and brought to fruition by Dr. Faroque Khan. Several IMANA members and I, participated in this conference. With the continuing efforts of Dr. Faroque Khan, IMANA will continue to be well-represented in the Knowledge Economic City of Madina.

In this issue of the journal we also publish a paper I presented as part of this conference. It discusses the high incidence of genetic diseases in Arab countries compared to developed countries. This paper discusses the cause of this increase and suggests strategies to reduce the incidence of genetic diseases.

A factor that is probably common in other Muslim communities is the prevalence of consanguineous marriages. Recently there was a discussion

about this phenomenon in the United Kingdom sparked by a statement by British Minister Woolas about "the worrisome rate of congenital defects in British Pakistani newborns and its association with the practice of cousin marriage."² A knee-jerk over-reaction by some Muslim groups labeled Mr. Woolas as an "Islamaphobe," and, on the other extreme, The *Sunday Times* used this statement to publish a provocative headline "Inbred Muslims deforming births," thereby turning a legitimate public health discussion into a racist indictment against the Muslim community.

Also published in this issue is a nice bacteriologic study of the causative organisms of lower respiratory tract infections in Iraqi patients. The authors used special techniques and were able to isolate relatively uncommon organisms, specifically *Nocardia*, *Legionella*, and *Mycoplasma* from both sputum as well as bronchial washing samples. These organisms were more commonly found in immunocompromised than immunocompetent patients.

Finally, I hope you enjoy this issue, and as usual I invite your submissions and comments.

Wassalaam,

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