

Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research 2011 - Interviews with the course participants - Fatima Kozacoka

Interview with

Karim Said Mohd Alawi

HIV/AIDS Consultant, Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan

Tell about yourself

My name is Said Mohd Karim Alawi. I am from Kabul, Afghanistan. I was graduated from Kabul Medical University in 1999. Then I was working as a medical doctor in Ali Abad Hospital in Kabul. Since 2004, I was working in the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH). From 2004-2006 as a Ministry of Public Health Strengthening Mechanism (MOPH-SM) project assistant and from November 2006 till September 2009 as a grant consultant in the Grant and Contract Management Unit (GCMU). In September 2009 I attended one year master program of public health (MPH) in the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam, Netherlands. After completion of the MPH in September 2010, when I came back to Afghanistan, I had a short term consultancy with the World Bank office in Kabul as HIV/AIDS Consultant. In April 2011 I have joined to the MOPH again as a health care financing senior officer.

Why you have chosen to study this course?

There are number of reasons why I have chosen to study this course. The main reasons are highlighted in below:

- I heard from those already attended to this course that this is a great opportunity to participate and be part of this group. The quality of this course, regarding the high qualified lecturers and facilitators and provision of the update learning materials, is also attracted me to choose this course.
- A direct contact will be built with WHO (department of Reproductive health and Research and department of Child and Adolescent Health) and other important research organizations.
- I need to improve my skills in research methodology particularly on sexual and reproductive health, which is one of the top priorities of my country, Afghanistan.
- There is a project in our departments (among other projects) named Demand Side Financing. This project is going to be ended in September, 2011. So it was decided to have a qualitative and quantitative study in order to find out the effects of the project. This was also paid my attention to choose this course to have the proper knowledge and skills in the research.
- By completion of this course, I will get adequate knowledge, skills and competencies in sexual and reproductive health and research in this field. Since Afghanistan is suffering from high maternal mortality.
- My thesis in the master program was about "Improving ANC in Afghanistan". This issue also encourages me to select this course to get more about maternal health related issues.
- Due to limited access to training because of time, place and financial constraints particularly in the developing countries, this course is providing access to education and learning by establishing a distance learning opportunity.
- I want to create a network of health professional from different horizons and training and research institutions for the exchange of knowledge and information.

How do you manage to combine your work commitments with course commitments?

Though I am working in a very challenging environment, but by implementing a good plan and time management I have succeeded to manage both activities: my work and course commitments. Every day I check the website of the course to find out what is newly added. Most of the time I work on the course assignments before and/or after the official working time, and sometimes during the one hour off that is allocated for lunch and pray. Of course, because of my severe interest to this course whenever I find a free time I go to the course website and search for more information.

How does a typical day at your work look like?

Every morning we have a short report to the head of the unit, and on Saturdays we have a joint internal meeting. At morning I attend meetings and other officials' forums inside and outside the MOPH, and mostly I am trying to stay at office in the afternoon in order to focus on my daily activities and my work requirements' activities. If there are workshops or seminars before attending to them I try to complete my daily working activities, read and answer the emails, and then attend to the workshops or seminars. Most of the time if I have some remaining activities that are not possible to fulfill during the official time, I prefer to stay longer and complete these assignments on time.

What was your biggest work challenge you have dealt with? (Share the outcome or the results)

Though all of my work in this newly established directorate is challenging, but the one I would like to mention here was very challenging. In the first day of my work, on July 17 2011, when my boss introduced me to other colleagues he said Dr. Alawi is going to cost the salary policy of the MOPH. The costing of the salary policy was requested from the higher authorities of the MOPH to be done by this directorate soon, but so far no one was taken to do this challenging assignment. In fact, in the ministry level it was the first time to cost a policy and doing this costing by a national employee. Fortunately, in a short time within three weeks I succeeded to present the first draft of the costing of the salary policy to the Consultative Group of Health & Nutrition (CGHN), then by receiving the comments from members of CGHN I presented the salary policy to the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for final approval. Though this was my first experience in the costing of a policy and it was very challenging because no one has already done the costing, but by doing hard work and commitment I succeeded to finalize this work.

Tell us about the most fun you have had on the job? (talk about fun by accomplishing something at work)

Most of the time we have fun during our daily works with our colleagues. But the most fun that even now we are talking about is the laptop fun. When I joined to my current position around five new colleagues joined to the department at the same time. We need to have computer in order to fulfill our daily activities, but purchasing of laptops took almost a month, and these laptops were planned to be procured through one of the donors. Every day when we came to the office the first word was about laptop and we insisted too much to have our laptop soon. Then the word laptop became a funny word in the department. When we met other colleagues they asked about our laptop and ask when will they bring the laptops, who should be responsible to get the laptops and other funny questions all about laptop. Even now that we have our computers when someone insists on some issues we say like laptop this issue is very important and making fun.

What would you like to achieve in five years?

First, I want to acquire adequate knowledge and skills in the research both quantitative and qualitative. Second, I want to have some achievements in the field of health insurance and costing of the MOPH policies and strategies. So in this regards I want to build my capacity because these areas are new and they are crucial for the future of the health sector. As it clear for all most of the current health projects are donors driven, therefore, we need to think about the sustainability of these projects in the future. In addition, affordability and acceptability of these projects need to be considered for a longer period. I want my directorate to be the pioneer of establishment of the health insurance and costing of policy and strategies in Afghanistan. Furthermore, I want to conduct some researches in the health sector by applying the knowledge and skills acquired from this course.