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The Health Academy

The first step towards a virtual school to promote public health world-wide

GENEVA, 11 December 2003 – The World Health Organization (WHO) announced today the launch of the Health Academy, in collaboration with Cisco Systems, Inc. The Health Academy is a novel approach to improve health through information technology. It will provide the general public with health information and knowledge required for preventing diseases and following healthier life styles.

The mission of the Health Academy is to demystify medical and public health practices and to make the knowledge of health specialists available to all citizens of the world through Internet-based technology. It will promote good health by explaining essential public health functions in a language that all people can understand, taking into consideration their individual cultural sensitivities.

Two pilot studies spanning the 2003-2004 academic year have just begun, one in Egypt and the other in Jordan. The studies are directed at 12 to 18 year old students in 20 schools in Egypt and 21 schools in Jordan. Based on this experience, the Health Academy may be expanded in the two pioneer countries as well as in other countries and regions of the world.

"The Health Academy provides unprecedented opportunities for effective health promotion through people-centred partnerships," said Dr LEE Jong-wook, Director-General of WHO. "It is more than just education; it is a means to influence attitudes and behaviour towards a healthier lifestyle, which in turn may help reduce gaps between prosperity and poverty and health and sickness", Dr LEE added.

The e-learning technology used by the Health Academy is more than just distance learning. It allows the learner to construct from first principles the very essence of what is being taught and to build on this knowledge. This approach helps to develop critical thinking and enhances concentration capacities. The curriculum is exciting to both educators and students, as it is a truly interactive mix of different media technologies.

WHO's rich information resources and expertise in health issues, as well as its worldwide access to health information in all countries, is the main source of validated health content for the Health Academy. Cisco Systems is responsible for the provision and deployment of information technology, and the development of the e-learning methodology.

"Cisco is proud to collaborate with the World Health Organization in this pioneering effort to extend health education to the world, in building stronger, healthier and more productive global communities", said Mr John Morgridge, Chairman of the Board, Cisco Systems. "Using Internet technology to advance learning has global reach and is a timely and stimulating way to deliver important curriculum to developed and developing countries around the globe."

The launch of the Health Academy was made at the Geneva Press Club, in the presence of H.E. Dr Fawaz Zu'bi, Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology of Jordan, and of Dr Sherif Hashem, First Secretary to the Minister of Telecommunications of Egypt. The project was also welcomed by Mr Hamadoun Touré, Director of Telecommunications development at the International Telecommunication Union, Mr Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner, and Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, Member of the European Parliament.

The educational process will not stop at the participating users enrolled in the courses. Once the Health Academy is established, the equipment and courses provided can be used in the evenings by parents and the general public under the guidance of the mentors. This could have important benefits in improving the teacher-parent relationships as well as educating people of all age groups in the use of the computer, accessing Internet and in the subjects selected. In addition, the Health Academy may be extended to community Internet centres and other points of access. As such, it is one way that health development will become entrenched in societies with access to information technology.

Other contributors to the Health Academy are the Geneva Foundation for Diseases of the Tropics, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

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