

## **AIMS Kochi affiliated as nodal centre for UNESCO bioethics for SAARC countries**

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AIMS at Kochi has been appointed as the Nodal Centre for UNESCO Bioethics for SAARC countries.

Dr N Dinesh from AIMS has taken charge as the Head, Kerala State, for the UNESCO Bioethics Network.

The event to mark the occasion was attended by Justice JB Joshy, Chairperson, Kerala Human Rights Commission; Dr Prem Nair, Medical Director, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences; Dr P Venkat Rangan, Vice Chancellor, Amrita University; Dr Russell D'Souza, Head, Asia Pacific Division of Chair of UNESCO Bioethics; Prof Dr OP Kalara, Vice Chancellor, Pandit BD Sharma University of Health Sciences, Haryana; and Prof Dr Arun Jamkar, President, Association of Indian Health Science Universities, along with Dr Mary Mathew, Head, National Training UNESCO Bioethics in Haifa and Dr A Marthanda Pillai, Coordinator, National UNESCO IMA Bioethics.

The UNESCO Bioethics Network in collaboration with the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences will study and develop curriculum for teaching, training and research in the field of bioethics (the field of ethical practice in medical and biological research), in order to address the lack of a composite bioethics structure in the SAARC countries.

The mandate is to develop an up-to-date syllabus for medical ethics education based on the well-accepted core curriculum of the UNESCO, which would also satisfy the requirements of medical schools in a region.

The network offers opportunities to collaborate in research across countries in answering research questions in ethical

issues, including areas that might have cultural and religious variations which could impact the method of teaching of ethics and the practice of ethics in clinical and other areas.

It also offers opportunities for research in bioethics and trains senior teachers in bioethics using the UNESCO Ethic Teachers Training Course.

The ethics syllabus aims to reduce incidents of ethical misconduct and malpractice by doctors who forgo ethical ways of practicing medicine.

It attempts to raise the bar of ethical standards of upcoming medical practitioners and researchers so that they are more compassionate and understanding with patients and patients' families, and treat them with respect, compassion and care.

"With over two thousand students currently enrolled in our schools of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, and allied health sciences, we can ensure maximum impact with regards to the dissemination of ethical standards of practice and conduct in clinical as well as research areas. This will also help our students achieve worldwide projection", said Dr N Dinesan, the newly appointed Head for the Bioethics network at AIMS.

The Indian medical education and health professional training program is the largest in the world with nearly 600 medical colleges and universities.

The Indian Bioethics Program of UNESCO Chair has established a robust program with a network of bioethics units in government and private medical colleges.

The Indian Medical Association and Medical Council of India are collaborating in the Chair's program of implementing a bioethics curriculum and providing training for teachers of bioethics.

The Indian program has developed and piloted a culturally relevant bioethics curriculum based on the UNESCO Core curriculum that is being used in over 200 institutions worldwide.

"The focus is on training our own students as well as students in SAARC countries in bioethics, which is an integral yet deeply neglected part of our field. Having an active program will benefit patients and their families in understanding the nature of their illness, and aid in making decisions periodically that address the complexity of the process of providing healthcare. We in SAARC countries are still very top down in our practice of medicine.

"We dictate what a patient should or shouldn't do, and that robs the patients of their voice, and goes against the standards of ethical conduct. Having an expert committee designing and implementing strategies for ethical conduct and drawing the line when it comes to medical treatment -- that is, taking into consideration what the family and patient want - will help us set up a more egalitarian healthcare system," said Dr Prem Nair, Medical Director of the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences.