

# Reintegrating Frontline Physicians into Global Academia: Insights from Icon-EM Türkiye 2022

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## To the Editor,

Armed conflicts disrupt health systems and often result in the scientific isolation of frontline physicians—those providing emergency and essential medical care in conflict-affected or resource-limited settings. In Syria, more than a decade of conflict has devastated infrastructure and fragmented healthcare delivery, leaving internally displaced persons (IDPs) and communities in tented settlements highly dependent on emergency services as their first point of access to care [1]. In this context, supporting the professional capacity of physicians working in northern Syria remains a global health priority. Since 2012, Türkiye has played a central role in providing humanitarian health services in Syria, establishing hospitals, field clinics, and referral networks that have reached millions of displaced civilians [2]. In parallel, a large number of Syrian healthcare professionals living in Syria have been trained through Türkiye and WHO-supported programs and integrated into humanitarian aid projects, thereby contributing to the resilience of local health systems [3]. Within this framework, the 2nd International Congress on Emergency Medicine (Icon-EM), held in Belek/Antalya on 10–13 November 2022, offered a rare opportunity to bridge the academic gap for physicians from northern Syria. Supported logistically by the World Health Organization (WHO), 28 Syrian physicians attended the congress through comprehensive arrangements covering cross-border travel, accommodation, and full scientific registration [4]. A dedicated session entitled “Holistic Management of Emergency Cases in Northern Syria” facilitated academic dialogue between

Syrian frontline physicians and Turkish emergency medicine experts. While this session served as a key platform for direct interaction, the educational and professional gains reported by participants reflected not only this specific session but also their broader engagement with the congress program as a whole, which included plenary lectures, workshops, and networking events. Syrian participants shared their experiences in managing trauma, obstetric emergencies, and critical conditions in resource-limited settings, while Turkish academics contributed evidence-based approaches. This exchange culminated in a synthesis of context-appropriate strategies for emergency care in conflict zones. To evaluate the initiative, structured post-congress surveys were administered to the 28 Syrian physicians who attended the congress, of whom 16 (57.1%) completed the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and means, were used to analyze the responses. The results highlighted four key themes:

**Scientific benefits:** Fifteen of the 16 respondents (93.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that the congress was scientifically beneficial (mean score: 4.25/5), reporting improved knowledge and an updated understanding of emergency case management.

**Academic motivation:** Fourteen participants (87.5%) indicated that the congress encouraged them to conduct academic research (mean: 3.88/5), and 13 participants (81.3%) felt more motivated to give academic presentations in the future (mean: 3.94/5).



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**Networking opportunities:** Thirteen participants (81.3%) stated that the event helped them build new academic relationships (mean: 4.00/5), fostering a sense of recognition and inclusion within the international medical community.

**Future engagement:** Fifteen participants (93.8%) expressed their willingness to attend or contribute to similar initiatives in the future (mean: 4.13/5).

These findings confirm that the initiative not only enhanced participants' scientific competence but also strengthened their academic engagement and motivation for ongoing collaboration.

In this regard, they align with prior literature emphasizing that capacity-building initiatives in humanitarian contexts not only enhance individual competencies but also contribute to system-level resilience [5]. What distinguishes the Türkiye–WHO initiative is its integration of academic capacity building within an already established humanitarian health framework. By connecting frontline physicians to international academic platforms, this model addressed both immediate training needs and the long-term consequences of scientific isolation.

In conclusion, the Icon-EM Türkiye 2022 experience demonstrates that, with targeted support, physicians in northern Syria can be effectively reintegrated into the global academic community. Sustaining such initiatives is essential to strengthening emergency care systems, improving outcomes for displaced populations, and promoting equity in global health.

## Ethics

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethical approval was not required because this letter reports a post-congress educational feedback survey us-

ing anonymized aggregate data; no identifiable personal or clinical data were collected. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

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