

## International Congress on Health in Arbaeen; to strengthen inter-departmental coordination and synergy to reduce the obstacles in providing health services to the pilgrims

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### Abstract

The 3rd international congress on Arbaeen in health was a significant event held from 2nd to 4th August, 2023 in Tehran, Iran. It brought together experts and scholars from nine countries to discuss and exchange knowledge on health-related issues during the Arbaeen pilgrimage. This congress provided a platform to explore innovative approaches, research findings, and best practices in promoting health and well-being among Arbaeen pilgrims. It also facilitated networking and collaboration among healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers, leading to the development of effective

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strategies for ensuring the health and safety of the millions of pilgrims participating in the Arbaeen pilgrimage. This congress will play a crucial role in advancing healthcare practices and enhancing the overall pilgrimage experience. The Arbaeen pilgrimage, which is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, takes place 40 days after Ashura, the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussain (AS), the third Imam of Shia Muslims, and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Each year, a huge crowd of people flock to Karbala, where the holy shrine of Imam Hussein (AS) is located, to perform mourning rituals. This year Arbaeen was on September 6, 2023.

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## Introduction

The Third International Congress on "Arbaeen in Health" was held in Tehran, Iran from August 2nd to 4th, 2023: The aim of the congress was to provide a platform for health professionals, researchers, and policy makers to discuss the latest research and developments in the field of health, particularly in relation to Arbaeen, a major religious gathering in Iraq. Topics included were the health needs of pilgrims, preventing infectious diseases, and protecting mental health. The congress featured keynote speakers, oral presentations, and poster sessions.<sup>1-2</sup> This congress intended to assess the deficiencies in the health sector during past Arbaeen marches and propose solutions. Prof Pazouki chancellor of Iran University of Medical sciences was the chairman of the Organisation Committee and he together with his team conducted a successful three days international congress. There were many enriching academic, scientific and professional sessions providing spiritual inspirations.

### Scientific sessions and cultural Events<sup>3</sup>

The scientific and cultural axes of the congress included 20 committees comprising of Health Committee, Nutrition committee, Cultural Committee, Information Technology Committee, Drug and Equipment Committee, Treatment Committee, Emergency Management Committee, International Committee, Relief Committee, Public relations and information committee, People's participation committee, Traditional Medicine Committee, Forensic Medicine Committee, Nursing Committee, Rehabilitation Committee, Research Committee, Mental Health Committee, Environmental Health Committee, Student committee and procession Committee. In addition, an exhibition of services and equipment needed to provide health and treatment services to Arbaeen pilgrim's was set up in the sideline of the congress.

There were 4 ministers from Iran and Iraq, Iran and Iraq Red Crescent and Red Cross, 12 Chancellors/Presidents of Medical Universities, many Deans of Medical Colleges, and a large number of professors, all health managers. There were 469 speakers comprising 227 keynotes and invited speakers, 242 oral presentations and 33 foreign speakers (10 online). The congress was spread out in 5 halls for 3 days of activities. About 386 abstracts were received (242 oral, 106 posters, whereas 38 were rejected). There were 2250 participants registered with 2096 CMEs. There were 14 workshops. The achievements included getting acquainted with several scholars who love Imam Hussain (A) in all parts of the world, increasing empathy and cooperation among medical scientists, an increase of more than 5 times the number of abstracts

compared to previous years, procession training by Iranian and Iraqi professors, officials' self-care brochure against heatstroke, and preparation of short health messages to be sent via SMS and prevalent mobile software.

### Day one: Opening ceremony

The first day began with the inaugural session, attended by a large number of guests from 40 countries including Iraq, Lebanon, the United States, England, Pakistan, Bahrain, Australia and Turkeye.

During the three-day congress, experts and scientific panels discussed the notable achievements of the past, success stories, and challenges related to healthcare and treatment services, experienced during the Arbaeen pilgrimage. But with the increasing number of pilgrims every year, the services required more efficiency.

The main objective of the congress was thus to look for improvement and enhanced efficacy of the present services. This was done by looking into the deficiencies of the past years and finding solutions through laying emphasis on enhancing interdepartmental coordination and fostering synergies with various service providers.

### Pakistan and SIVU/IMI Delegates

The delegation from Pakistan included Prof Mulazim Hussain Bukhari who spoke on: How to make safe the mass gathering, Prof Salma Kundi discussed Community Partnership for life saving skills training, Prof Mowadat Hussain Rana talked on Karbala: A perpetual source of mental wellness. Dr Asad Ali Shah addressed the challenges in Health setting during Arbaeen and way forward towards improvement, Dr Muhammad Baqir spoke on Cultural values and ethics of Arbaeen, whereas Dr Shaharyar talked on Arbaeen: Real need of medical health care system: How to improve the medical, cultural and Islamic values of Arbaeen mass gathering. Mr Muhammad Ali Kumail discussed The Role of cybercrime at large gatherings.

The experts who could not attend this conference physically, presented their talks virtually on-line. These included: Proffessor Shabih Zaidi, the past president of IMI who addressed the subject of Ethical considerations at Arbaeen, Prof Sarwat Hussain from USA introduced the subject of Initiating Diagnostic Services at Arbaeen, Prof Arshad Qayyumi spoke on How to reduce cardiac issues and manage them during Arbaeen, Prof Huma Naqvi talked on Rehabilitative needs during Arbaeen, Dr Azmat Hussain explored management of cardiac issues in disaster and mass gatherings.

### Pakistan and SIVU/IMI Delegates presenting the

## Shield to Chairman 3rd Arbaeen Congress

### Day 2 of the Congress:

On the second day of the congress, Dr. Mustafa Ahmadi Moghadam, Director of Mirjaveh Health and Treatment Network, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, spoke on a panel about the difficulties faced by Arbaeen pilgrims at the border crossings. Discussed were the challenges related to these mass gatherings, which included the influx of people at the province's border terminals leading to various health and treatment obstacles. He also emphasized the significance of environmental health and the provision of safe water.

Prof Mulazim Hussain Bukhari from Pakistan, concentrated on health issues of the Mass gatherings, which included public health challenges to pilgrims, the host countries cultural and health system and leading to an increased risk for respiratory and communicable diseases.

Other difficulties observed are, lack of an appropriate transportation system, inadequate health care system, lack of access to safe water, danger of acquiring infectious diseases, overcrowding, lack of medicines and medical equipment. Moreover, more commonly observed are, water and food borne diseases, along with skin and respiratory illnesses, such as the influenza.

The recent COVID-19 Pandemic has been a great teacher. It was suggested that certain vaccines should be made mandatory for all pilgrims before participating in the Arbaeen event. These include vaccination against COVID-19, typhoid, Polio, meningococcal meningitis, hepatitis A and B, and diphtheria/tetanus.

A considerable amount of walking is expected in the Arbaeen pilgrimage which can be challenging or at times dangerous. To overcome this challenge regular exercise should be considered. These demands creating a regular walking habit. Good personal hygiene and social distancing is considered essential for preventing the spread of infections

The chances of stampedes have to be considered in such mass gatherings which can result in Disaster. The previous Karbala stampede of 10 September 2019 caused the death of 31 pilgrims with approximately 100 more injured. This demands adequate training of the task force controlling the mass gathering.

### Day 3 CLOSING CEREMONY

Dr. Habib Ghaznavi, Chancellor of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, and Dr. Mustafa Ahmadi Moghadam, Director of Mirjaveh Health and Treatment Network, were

honoured with a certificate of appreciation.

The contribution of Prof Mulazim Hussain Bukhari from Pakistan was highly appreciated. Additionally, the presentation by Mrs. Asiye Amin Afshar from Zahedan University of Medical Sciences titled "Responsiveness and preparation of the health system for the Arbaeen gatherings at the border-crossings: a qualitative content analysis from southeast Iran," was considered the best presentation of the congress. Dr. Mustafa Ahmadi Moghadam was recognized as the top speaker on the panel. He spoke on 'The challenges encountered by Arbaeen pilgrims at the border crossings.

**Conference recommendations** which are expected to fill the existing gaps in the health services provided at Arbaeen.

1. Risk assessment and mitigation strategies for mass gatherings. Considering the hot season during Arbaeen, the health of food for pilgrims should be given more attention and planning should be done to provide food services with care to special patients.
2. Regarding personal and public health, suitable solutions for pilgrims should be on the agenda, and for the treatment of skin, muscle, and skeletal diseases, drugs and equipment are also provided by the scientific committee of Arbaeen.
3. Emerging trends and technologies in event management and Collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.
4. Provision of one day refresher training to health care providers in early detection and management of Mass Gathering conditions and psychological first aid.
5. Hygienic principals must be followed to make safe the mass gathering, this needs training of the pilgrims and their leaders. Involving social media, electronic media, and journals to highlight the importance of mass gathering health, travel, and pilgrimage responsibilities."
6. Additionally, there is a need for further research on the impact of Arbaeen on cybercrime, role of artificial intelligence, mental health and the development of strategies to mitigate any negative effects.

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