

The Pan Arab Interventional Radiology Society: Renaissance and Research

Glittering with promise, vascular interventional radiology (VIR) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has witnessed great progress. Over the past few years, the Pan Arab Interventional Radiology Society (PAIRS) has made tremendous efforts to promote the specialty at all possible levels. The PAIRS annual meeting has grown to a record attendance in 2019 and has received widespread international recognition by peer societies. The PAIRS has led several public awareness campaigns and structured courses to introduce and disseminate VIR knowledge among medical students and interns. Other local societies including the Saudi Interventional Radiology Society (SIRS) and the Egyptian Society of Interventional Radiology have led similar parallel efforts including annual meetings, local didactic courses, and campaigns. This has translated into a significant increase in the number of VIR fellows and keen radiology residents over the past years, thereby recruiting the next generation of VIR practitioners in the MENA region. Most importantly, there is increasing public awareness and recognition of VIR as a primary specialty, and direct access is now being sought by patients. Bridging the gender gap is a priority in PAIRS activities, thereby increasing the participation of females in VIR activities and training.

This momentum has enabled the PAIRS to initiate parallel efforts to enhance its visibility on the research map. In his keynote lecture in PAIRS 2019, Dr. Benenati identified the similarities in progress between the SIR and PAIRS. One of his main highlights was the *Arab Journal of Interventional Radiology* (AJIR), the official scientific publication of PAIRS, which was launched in January 2017 and is being published biannually. AJIR has published a total of 61 peer-reviewed articles including 12 original clinical studies, 16 case reports, 7 review articles, and PAIRS annual meeting proceedings. AJIR was recently indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals, another step toward future indexing in the Emerging Sources Citation Index and PubMed. Several writing and reviewing workshops were conducted during PAIRS meetings in collaboration with the *Journal of Vascular Interventional Radiology* (JVIR) to increase the footprint of PAIRS and enhance manuscript-writing skills. The PAIRS also provides scholarships to first authors of accepted articles in AJIR to attend the annual PAIRS meeting in Dubai. Twenty-three authors were qualified for this scholarship during the 2019 meeting, and this number is expected to increase in future meetings. AJIR's "Article of the Year" award was launched in the 2019 meeting, and the first recipient was Shaker *et al.* for their publication on the "Outcome of transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt in Budd–Chiari syndrome: Long-term

outcomes of 118 patients; A single-center experience." Despite these endeavors, more efforts are required to boost research capacity in the MENA region. Altering the focus of research from personal curiosity and academic promotion to more systematic research will generate guidelines and drive clinical decisions based on locally produced data. Research and innovation have been the essence of VIR since its inception, and the emerging nature of VIR practice in the region represents a fertile environment for research. Vital steps are needed to improve research output from the MENA countries. Incorporation of research training in residency and fellowship programs will drive an increase in research output, and now the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties requires residents and fellows to participate and publish at least one article in a peer-reviewed journal. Regional and local VIR societies in the MENA region need to collaborate locally and internationally to participate in worldwide multicentric studies and establish disease- or procedure-specific registries. Industries and research institutions should consider funding more VIR-relevant basic sciences and clinical studies to explore new opportunities, treatments, interventional tools, and medications for diseases more prevalent in the region. VIR research could be of special interest to legislators and health-care administrators as a potential factor for reducing health-care expenditure.

From the AJIR editorial desk, I call all responsible partners and VIR stakeholders in the MENA region to invest more efforts in research and innovation, as they are the main pillars of VIR stewardship and advancement.

Mohammad Arabi^{1,2}

¹Department of Medical Imaging, Division of Vascular Interventional Radiology, King Abdulaziz Medical City, ²King Abdullah International Medical Research Center, Ministry of National Guard-Health Affairs, Riyadh 11426, Saudi Arabia.
E-mail: marabi2004@hotmail.com

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.arabjir.com
	DOI: 10.4103/AJIR.AJIR_14_19

How to cite this article: Arabi M. The pan Arab interventional radiology society: Renaissance and research. Arab J Intervent Radiol 2019;3:41.