

## Inviting generations to protect Qatar's long-term health profile

**QATAR** Biobank is the nation's long-term medical health initiative, and we have only recently begun the pilot test study of collecting samples and information on health and lifestyle from large numbers of the Qatari population.

This is a long-life project because we are seeking to reach out to one-third of the population of Qatar, in terms of Qatari people and long-term residents – people who have been living here for more than 15 years and have been exposed to the same environment. The target is to collect biological samples such as blood, urine and saliva from healthy Qataris and non-Qataris, and when we collect these samples we will store the results and have this information ready to be used by other researchers.

We want to answer some of the questions regarding the main health issues in Qatar, which tend to be diabetic or cardiovascular, or neurological in nature. Once an individual has participated, we give them the option to be contacted for a follow-up examination after two or three years to check if they have developed any ailments.

Studying these changes in individuals will help us a lot in approaching personalized medicine, meaning we recommend medication for people according to their genetic profile. This is a new trend where people will be able to target the optimum medication rather than take something that has been tested on another population with different genetic profiles, which could lead to side effects. This is the main target for this project.

The project itself was established in partnership with Imperial College London, as it was establishing a similar project in the UK targeting a huge number of people and following up their health conditions. We divided our work with Imperial College in the pre-pilot study, which had 100 participants. The main stage in that study was to evaluate our methods, questionnaires and our approach towards the community.

Now we are starting our pilot

study, which will focus on two main institutes: Qatar Foundation employees and their families, and Hamad Medical Corporation employees and their families. We would like to see two or three generations of families participate, so we can track their respective genes.

### “We want to answer some of the main questions regarding health issues in Qatar”

This research is not only for the benefit of the volunteers, but also their children and the nation itself. We have just begun the pilot test study and are aiming to see roughly 80,000 people within the next 10 years and 35,000 within the next five years. But the study does not end by collecting the sample and storing them. We need to attract prestige institutes to use these samples for good quality research to benefit Qatar, not just to benefit scientists.

Ultimately Qatar Biobank will help a lot of decision-makers decide on the best medicine to keep patients healthy, and will lead to personalized medicine, which will lead the nation to better safeguarding of healthy lifestyles for generations to come.

© If you are interested in contributing to Qatar Biobank you can call: 4438899 or email: [takepart@qatarbiobank.org.qa](mailto:takepart@qatarbiobank.org.qa). You can also visit: [www.qatarbiobank.org.qa](http://www.qatarbiobank.org.qa) or follow @BiobankQatar on Twitter.

#### COLUMNIST

Dr Asma Al Thani PhD  
is Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Trustees,  
Qatar Biobank.