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AUBMC AND EMBRACE FUND LAUNCH LEBANON'S FIRST NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION AND REVEAL COUNTRY'S FIRST SUICIDE DATA

One Person Every Three Days Dies by Suicide in Lebanon

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Public Health and in the presence of his Excellency Minister Wael Abu Faour, the Department of Psychiatry and Embrace Fund at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) launched Lebanon's first National Awareness Campaign for Suicide Prevention on September 10, 2014. The press conference, held at Issam Fares Institute (Green Oval) – auditorium at the American University of Beirut revealed Lebanon's first suicide related data.

"Suicide is a serious public health problem that affects the whole community," said Dr. Ziad Nahas, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the American University of Beirut Medical Center.

In its latest report on suicide prevention, the World Health Organization estimated that 43 deaths by suicide occurred in Lebanon in 2012 (WHO, 2014). However, official records for that same year reveal a serious discrepancy: 107 deaths by suicide were registered. Accordingly, someone dies from suicide in Lebanon every three days. Experts believe this number is an underestimation of the scope of the problem. Social, religious, and legal aspects of the local culture bias the reporting of suicide cases.

THE CURRENT SPECIALTIES AT AHNI

Neurosurgery

- Epilepsy surgery
- Brain tumors
- Brain mapping
- Spinal surgery
- Skull base surgery
- Functional neurosurgery

Neurology

- Epilepsy
- Sleep disorders
- Neuromuscular diseases
- Multiple sclerosis
- Movement disorders
- Headache clinic

Pediatric Neurology

- Neuro-genetics
- Epilepsy

Psychiatry

- Substance abuse
- Psychometric testing
- Individual, couple, family and group psychotherapy
- General psychiatry
- Mood disorders
- Child and adolescent psychiatry
- Neuromodulation
- Sleep disorders

A number of local studies have also highlighted the presence of suicidal ideation, a major risk factor for death by suicide. The Global School-based Student Health survey revealed that 15% of students aged 13 to 15 years in Lebanon seriously consider attempting suicide at one point during this critical age (WHO, 2011). Two recent studies conducted by the AUBMC Department of Psychiatry (pending publication) also point to the urgency of attending to this problem. One found prevalent suicidal ideation rate among healthcare workers in Lebanon. The other estimated that one third of psychiatric patients seeking treatment struggle with thoughts of self-harm.

"Suicide is preventable," added Dr. Nahas. Nine out of ten suicide cases are a result of some form of mental illness like depression, drug or alcohol dependence, and schizophrenia that can be treated (WHO, 2014). In Lebanon, one out of every four individuals suffers from a mental disorder throughout their lives, but only a minority obtains treatment (Karam et al., 2008).



The World Health Organization recommends a number of strategies for suicide prevention, including reducing access to the means of suicide, having responsible reporting by the media (i.e, not sensationalizing or glamourizing suicide) and strengthening community and social support. With this national campaign, Embrace Fund took a serious first step towards suicide prevention in Lebanon by starting a well-needed conversation around a topic considered by many as a taboo and a serious problem that affects us all.

"Being up to date with the latest in neurology and psychiatry is fundamental and considered to be one of the major pillars of the AUBMC 2020 vision in areas related to health care, scientific and academic research," said Dr. Mohamed Sayegh, vice president of Medical Affairs and dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the American University of Beirut. "In 2013, we launched, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon's First National Mental Health Awareness Campaign, and we are also working on the establishment of several centers of excellence to address similar specific diseases," added Dr. Sayegh.

To accompany the campaign throughout the month of September, a unique event took place at Raouche whereby all proceeds raised from the walk were directed towards funding a suicide hotline, a vital service that is currently non-existent in Lebanon.

In a short period of time since its launching in October 2013, Embrace Fund at AUBMC set in motion the first large scale media-driven National Mental Health Awareness Campaign in Lebanon "Fekko el 3e2de", and began assisting underprivileged psychiatric patients in covering their treatment expenses.

FROM BENCH TO CLINICAL DELIVERY: THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION

The Abou Haidar Neuroscience Institute held the second Neuroscience Symposium entitled: From Bench to Clinical Delivery: The Latest Development in Treatment of Depression on Saturday, January 10, 2015 at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel, Beirut.

Regional and national psychiatrists, neurologists, general practitioners, psychologists, and basic science researchers and educators attended the event. Renowned international experts in the field presented the latest development in depression and its treatment.

This one-day activity was a comprehensive depression-specific symposium that addressed depression from basic science to clinical treatment, algorithms, and novel advances.

NEWS FROM PSYCHIATRY

“AKEED RA7 FEE2” NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION, SEPTEMBER 2014

The campaign included a series of elements to raise community awareness as a first step towards preventing suicide: a TV spot featuring His Excellency Minister of Public Health Wael Abu Faour, billboard ads, social media engagement, and “Into the Dawn” suicide memorial walk.



كل 3 ايام في شخص **يبتدر** بلبنان

اكيد رح فيق

و امشي للوقاية من الانتحار

الاحد 21 ايلول الساعة 5 صباحاً من مطعم بيت ورد الروشة الى صخرة الروشة

www.andrecafund.org



The campaign held the slogan, "Akid Ra7 Fee2" ("I will surely wake up"). It aimed at encouraging people to wake up early and join the walk at 5:00 am on September 21, 2014. It also called their attention to the alarming fact that every three days, someone in Lebanon dies by suicide.

Over 150 people showed up to the walk despite the early hour.

The greatest surprise to attendees and later to all Lebanese, was "embracing" the Raouche rock with a banner that reflected hope.



The campaign attracted major media outlets. Over 32 television and radio appearances including BBC, Reuters, Al-Jazira, Sky News Arabia, LBCI, and over 15 articles in local and regional newspapers such as Annahar, Al-Shark El-Awsat and others covered the event.

FIRST VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION FOR DEPRESSION

The Department of Psychiatry, neurosurgery and anesthesia clinical services, Embrace fund at AUBMC and the Ministry of Public Health all collaborated to implant the first case of Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) therapy for treatment-resistant depression in the region. The practice of VNS therapy for refractory epilepsy has been adopted by AUBMC since 2003 under the leadership of Dr. Beydoun.

VNS therapy consists of an implanted pacemaker-like device that delivers mild, intermittently pulsed signals to the patient's left vagus nerve, which then activates various areas of the brain. The world's first VNS therapy implantation intended to treat depressive symptomatology was conducted at the Medical University of South Carolina back in 1998. The US FDA approval for such indication followed in 2005 supported by long-term open clinical data.



A careful selection of the right candidate is key for VNS therapy to benefit the patient. VNS therapy doubles the chances of getting better within one year from implantation, as opposed to traditional treatment. This in turn can be life saving for many.

Congratulations to Drs. Marwan Najjar and Mounir Khani and their teams. Let us all strive to make a difference in our community.

DR. AGNES VARIS HEALING PROGRAM FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

The Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Program at AUBMC, a program which deals with the misuse of one or more substance such as alcohol leading to a clinically significant impairment, is a first advanced and voluntary step towards recovery. The Dr. Agnes Varis Healing Program, which was launched in 2015, is a momentous step in treating a growing problem in the Lebanese community in specific, and the Arab region in general. The program started receiving outpatients who need treatment for any addiction or dependence disorders.

This is a four weeks program (extended as needed) with daily individual and group therapy activities, under the care of our substance abuse counselors, a specialized nurse, and a psychiatrist (specialized in addiction).

Colleagues, community based mental health professionals, and self-referrals are welcomed by department members for further analysis and treatment.



NEWS FROM THE MS CENTER

More than 1000 patients have been registered at AUBMC MSC

The AUBMC multiple sclerosis center (MSC) proudly announces surpassing 1000 patients registered at the center.

AUBMC MSC started functioning on the date of its inauguration in October 4, 2011. On that same day, the first MS patient was registered in our premises. During the past years, on account of a competent multidisciplinary team and an effective and perseverant system of care, the total number of registered patients at the center exceeded 1170 patients as shown in the chart below.

We always seek to provide the best specialized care to patients with multiple sclerosis and exceed their expectations.

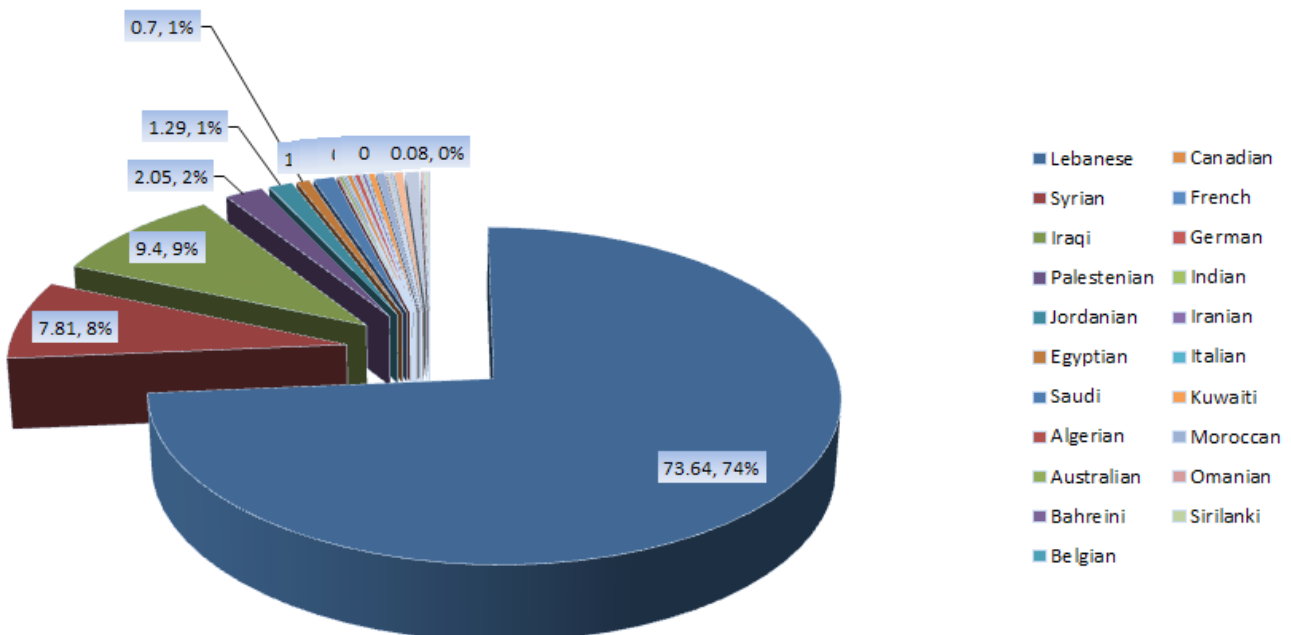
"It is easy to get a thousand prescriptions but hard to get one single remedy."

~Chinese proverb~

BEIRUT BY BIKE

Friends of MS at AUBMC multiple sclerosis center and Beirut by Bike organized a Bike for Charity on Sunday May 18, 2014 between 10 am and 12 pm. Bikes were offered free of charge, and all contributions were donated to support MS patients at AUBMC. More than 200 participants attended this event.

Percentage of MS patients registered



MS AWARENESS SESSION AT THE COLLEGE NOTRE IN JAMHOUR

During the month of April 2014, the MS center organized in collaboration with the College Notre De Jamhour (CNDJ) an awareness session for students, families, and teachers. The outstanding humanitarian efforts of CNDJ students supported the MS patients by the different educational and fundraising activities held during the day. A donation of \$3000 was made to the AUBMC MS center to support needy MS patients.

BEIRUT MARATHON

More than 200 contestants supporting AUBMC MS center participated during the Beirut Marathon on November 9, 2014. This year Mr. Omar El Turk, national basketball player, attended the marathon to support MS patients at AUBMC MSC.



FRIENDS OF MS AT AUBMC

FUNDRAISING EVENT

The Multiple Sclerosis Center and friends of MS at AUBMC organized a fundraising event for the 3rd consecutive year on Saturday, January 17, 2015 at the Four Seasons Hotel, Beirut under the patronage and in the presence of Mrs. Lama Tamam Salam.

Mrs. Salam expressed her pride in supporting the Multiple Sclerosis Center at AUBMC, a center which is committed to delivering the highest quality of care to this community. "It is a noble goal because this center, managed by Dr. Samia Khoury and her highly dedicated and specialized team, is the only center in Lebanon dedicated to MS patients and their families, supporting them psychologically and financially," she added.

The Minister of Public Health, Mr. Wael Abou Faour, attended the ceremony and thanked the entire team at the AUBMC MS Center. "Multiple Sclerosis is a disease that is not well-known to the Lebanese, hence the need for awareness campaigns, follow-up, and research. We have to be supportive of the patients on the financial level to provide them with reliable and affordable treatment. Patients who face difficulties in paying for their medication or treatment should not hesitate to come forward to the ministry in order to receive the appropriate assistance and help. After all, the Ministry of Public Health is responsible for the healthcare of all the Lebanese citizens."

Dr. Samia Khoury, professor of neurology and director of AUBMC's Abou Haidar Neuroscience Institute (AHNI) and Therese and Nehme Tohme Multiple Sclerosis Center (MS), delivered a speech explaining the symptoms

behind multiple sclerosis. She pointed out the commonality of this disease among women rather than men. She also highlighted the support and contribution of the Ministry of Public Health in the treatment of patients as well as the extensive research conducted by the center to help in the treatment of the disease, with the future goal of minimizing the dependency on research conducted in Europe and the US.

It's worth mentioning that along with Mrs. Rola Safa, the master of the ceremony, George Khabbaz, a talented Lebanese artist and comedian, who supports the center, attended the event. He spread a convivial atmosphere among the attendees and expressed his pride towards this specialized and unique center that demonstrates the Lebanese fortitude in progressing in various fields especially those related to diseases, medical researches, and special treatments.

NEWS FROM NEUROLOGY

On June 7, 2014 the Department of Neurology held its annual graduation dinner at Gruen.

The graduates were:

- Dr. Ahmad Fawaz (Epilepsy and Clinical Neurophysiology Fellowship)
- Dr. Wael Radwan (Clinical Neurophysiology: Neuromuscular Disorders Fellowship)
- Dr. Salem Hammoud (Neurology Residency)
- Dr. Sandrine Salman (Neurology Residency)





MEET THE NEUROLOGIST

DR. ASHRAF MAKKI

Dr. Makki joined the Department of Neurology as an assistant professor. He will be running the headache clinic at the neuroscience outpatient center.

1. What triggered your interest in the field of neurology?

The significant complexity of the human nervous system, yet the staggering logical simplicity of the unit at the basis of this system is behind my constant fascination with neurology.

2. Tell us a about your education and work; AUB, after AUB and back to AUB.

I finished my undergraduate studies in Health Sciences and my graduate studies in Neuroscience and Medicine at AUB, where I spent nine years. Then I joined Emory University for eight years of residency and

fellowships. I then moved to Florida where I practiced clinical neurology. That further shaped my interests and clinical expertise. In addition to the clinical work, my practice size grew significantly and as a result, my administrative responsibilities. I was entrusted with more responsibilities as a director of the Stroke Center of Excellence, chairman of the department, member of the Board of Trustees of a medical center, and lastly president of the Florida Society of Neurology. Yet, the return to Lebanon and my alma mater were irresistible, and here I am.

3. How do you see your area over the next ten years at AUBMC?

I feel very lucky when I think about the future of my interests at AUBMC.

There is a strong resolve in the leadership of the department, the neuroscience center, and the faculty to grow and nurture subspecialty interests.

Neuromuscular disorders and electrodiagnostics continue to increase in volume, and this will allow more dedicated time and a promising framework for clinical research.

Headache medicine is stepping out as a subspecialty in many major institutions, and so far I have noticed a huge need for such a specialized center in Lebanon to meet the demands of a large patient population. In fact, only AUBMC could emanate and offer such a unique, state-of-the-art center in the region.

In addition, there is a promising opportunity to participate in a multispecialty comprehensive pain center. Again, in Lebanon, there is also a huge gap in that regards. AUBMC is a major destination in such a situation since it emerges as the largest provider of care and treatment when dealing with complex conditions requiring multidisciplinary approaches.

4. If you were to address a group of medical students interested in neurology, what would be the message you'd like them to know and that would impact their future careers?

The interest in neurology should be fueled by a fascination for the disease mechanism, an awe to how often things go right in our brain, rather than by direct results of interventions.

5. Outside AUBMC and medicine, how do you spend your time, and what do you like to do the most?

Kids, kids, kids. I am very blessed with a great family, and I try to spend most of my time with my kids, wife, parents and in-laws.

A highlight of the return to Lebanon has been the proximity to the family.

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