

July 20, 2020

Dear members of the AUB community,

This past week was an exceptionally difficult one as we were forced to lose 850 members of our community, with 650 staff laid off and 200 more whose contracts will not be renewed or who will retire and not be replaced. Over the past months, we have worked diligently to identify where job reduction could be realized without jeopardizing operations and allowing AUB to remain affordable, all while continuing to provide transformative education and world-class patient care. These efforts, led by the administration and in collaboration with the Workers and Staff Syndicate of AUB, substantially reduced the number of jobs lost from those previously predicted to 850. At the same time, we rapidly built an expanded social safety net, whereby we are paying between 6-24 months of severance pay based on a sliding scale of years of service, continuing to pay for the AUB education of the departing employees' children in undergraduate programs until their graduation, maintaining all funding of school education for one year, and offering much-needed health benefits.

Due to several factors, most layoffs came from our medical center and they came from all ranks, including the prior senior management team. AUBMC did not maximize accrual of adequate reserves over the past decade and mobilized slowly to sufficiently control costs once the Lebanese financial crisis began to accelerate in 2019. The medical center was being developed to provide Lebanon and the peoples of the region with world-class patient care on an expanded, state-of-the-art level, a mission we will cautiously resume once Lebanon and the region's economies stabilize. In this vastly diminished economy, AUBMC has a substantial over-staffing problem in many units, which is unsustainable and had to be urgently addressed. AUBMC Director Joe Otayek and Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (FM) Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, along with an entirely new, homegrown leadership team, are committed to a more sustainable, strategic, and compassionate approach to both the medical center and our historic medical school. We are confident they will set AUBMC and FM on the right path.

We fully understand the dire impact of the layoffs given the disastrous state of Lebanon's economy, but it was precisely those circumstances that made it impossible for AUB to avoid this severe measure. Before reaching this point, every avenue was explored to cut costs and increase efficiency on campus and at the medical center, including closure of underperforming university units. Additional funding support was sought from the US and Lebanese governments and from private foundations and individuals. Those in top leadership positions and some higher-paid faculty and staff members have been giving back 10-20% of their salary for months. I myself have been giving back 25% of my salary since mid-November 2019. Capital construction projects have been canceled or delayed, non-critical maintenance deferred, university travel eliminated, and hiring frozen.

It is always important to acknowledge where we could have done better. The reality is that letting this many people go from the AUB family was never going to be easy. Leaving one's home and family because of external economic factors is even more painful. The manner of the departures, especially at AUBMC, could and should have been better handled, and some confusion and pain could have been avoided. Many have questioned the presence of the army and police at AUBMC. To be clear, the security presence was made necessary after credible external threats were received earlier in the week, which led to recommendations for high-level security. The safety of the personnel, the patients, the students, and the general public was and will always be of paramount priority. We therefore reluctantly abided by these recommendations. We recognize that this security presence should have been better managed. We will learn from this experience but as we always do, these are things we own and will build on.

In these heartbreaking times, we must all set aside our differences and work together to strive towards a better tomorrow. Our greatest concerns at this time include carefully restoring morale, especially at AUBMC, empowering our precious human assets while we continue to educate the best and brightest, serve our community, carry out groundbreaking research, and provide world-class care at our medical center. We must do this all while balancing the budget, with a disproportionate amount of our revenues now being generated in a collapsing Lebanese economy, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and deep global recession.

As I have stated repeatedly over the past five years, we must strive to first help ourselves in order for others to believe we are worth helping. That is true for AUB, for the higher education and healthcare sectors in Lebanon and the Arab world, and more than likely for the peoples of the region. AUB has always been a vital institution for Lebanon, the region, and beyond. Its community has repeatedly come together in the face of monumental challenges. We now must again rely on the strength of our community to emerge from this unprecedented series of crises. We need our outstanding AUB Board, faculty, staff, students, alumni community, and friends to stand by us, continue to give generously whenever they can, feel free to criticize thoughtfully, but also to truly partner with us in building a better, more sustainable, and more inclusive AUB.

Sincerely,

Fadlo R. Khuri, MD
President