

Celebrating 10,000 Refugees with Sijilli Cloud-Based Electronic Health Record: Sharing a Story of Success

Speech by President Fadlo Khuri

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I would like to warmly welcome you to this celebration of 10,000 cloud-based electronic health records that are now part of the Sijilli database, created for Syrian refugees by the Global Health Institute (GHI) and our partners at Epic.

In this past decade, we have been burdened with several crises that have affected us in the MENA region, and beyond our borders reaching around the world. The ongoing war in Syria and the resulting displacement of millions has become the worst humanitarian crisis of this century. Despite global efforts in aiding both the refugees and host communities, we are witnessing a struggle to secure basic necessities for those in need, including essential health services. This crisis has presented health professionals and systems with unprecedented challenges.

As Albert Einstein said, “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.” And as all of you probably know, AUB has never been one to watch without doing anything.

Since it was founded over a century and a half ago, our university has always put humanity first, while playing its role as a provider of excellence in education and a contributor in the advancement of knowledge through research. Our different AUB centers, departments, projects, and initiatives continuously rally for the rights of the vulnerable and less fortunate in Lebanon, the region, and the world. In terms of health, specifically, AUB’s strategic location has allowed it to play a crucial role in the treatment of the injured and the evolution of health care in the region.

In 2016, AUB initiated its Health 2025 vision, aiming to leverage its excellence in the schools of health sciences, nursing, and medicine, and transform the university into a home for an inclusive, world-class health sciences campus. This vision’s strategic aim is to better serve the clinical and health needs of the peoples of Lebanon, the MENA region, and the Global South. Under the umbrella of Health 2025 we established GHI almost 3 years ago, becoming the first institute of its kind in the MENA region dedicated to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the global health agenda with a Global South perspective, and to transform the global health dialogue to focus on contextualized solutions that are sustainable and proportionally dependent on local and regional capacity.

So far, GHI has generated and incubated significant research, capacity building, and outreach, demonstrating leadership in diverse areas beyond digital health records for refugees, in conflict medicine, cancer registration in low and middle-income countries, capacity building and streamlining in the Lebanese NGO sector, training women’s health practitioners, and bringing together knowledge, practice, and advocacy to tackle obesity and diseases associated with poor nutrition.

Through these initiatives, AUB's leading role in furthering research on health and employing innovative technologies in health in the region is more evident than ever, whether through the use of augmented reality for training, innovative distance learning approaches to build capacity among different target groups including lay populations, or the employment of different e-health tools that enhance access to different community members, especially the disadvantaged, to health services.

Today, we are celebrating yet another success that GHI has achieved in partnership with the healthcare software company, Epic. Sijilli, meaning "my record" in Arabic, was launched a couple of years ago as a cloud-based mobile electronic health record system designed to capture essential health information, similar to a basic medical record. The aim is to make it possible to securely collect and maintain health data of displaced individuals, knowing that these individuals, who are exposed to various health risks due to migration, have difficulty acquiring their health records from their home countries, let alone keeping them from being damaged or making sure they're updated throughout their journey.

On January 11, 2020, the team of the Esahha Program at GHI hit their first target of 10,000 cloud-based electronic health records on Sijilli, for female and male refugees of all age groups. The project was implemented in different Lebanese areas like the Beqaa, Akkar, the South, and Beirut in collaboration with several local NGOs. Such models of partnerships, coupled with the employment of low-resource innovations, remain much needed to enhance the resilience of health systems in situations of fragility.

Sijilli has made it possible for all Syrian refugees across Lebanon—the country with the highest proportion of refugees per capita worldwide—to have access to their cloud-based medical records, allowing them to receive optimal healthcare regardless of where they are in their displacement journey, especially in terms of screening and diagnosis.

Indeed this is a great demonstration of dedication to aiding at-risk populations, and perseverance always striving to provide a better chance for all members of our community, regardless of their conditions.

I will leave you with the words of American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson who says, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

Congratulations to GHI, Epic, and everyone who worked on making Sijilli a functional and effective solution to those who are most vulnerable, and thank you for joining us in this celebration.