

“Flattening the curve,” a phrase understood by almost all experts in the healthcare field, became a global goal to achieve amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a goal, not only needed to alleviate the burden on healthcare facilities, but also an objective to retain healthcare access for patients with non-communicable diseases, prominently chronic diseases. The shift of research interest from NCDs to communicable diseases is unequivocal and alarming, particularly considering the world’s current reality. I do not intend to undermine the significance of CDs for the likes of COVID-19, but experts ought not to overlook the existence of other epidemics that are NCDs such as Diabetes Mellitus or cardiovascular diseases that also require a “curve flattening,” so to speak.

Good afternoon to my illustrious professors, devoted faculty members, fellow colleagues, and distinguished guests. As the first 2-semester diploma SHARPees cohort of 2022, we can ascertain that the program exacts a similar toll on its students as it does on those joining the 7-week summer program. We might have not quote-on-quote “Eaten, Slept, SHARP, and Repeated”, as most SHARP alumni described, but we certainly did all that on top of our demanding full-time jobs in a tumultuous Lebanon, be it research work, straining medical residency, humanitarian field work, USMLE Steps, and/or teaching and precepting by faculty members amongst my colleagues. An 8-month program is absolutely more relaxed than that of a 7-week program, but make no mistake, as the SHARP diploma is as demanding and requires vigilance in all its modalities and facets. Surely, some of us may have felt overconfident and relaxed, due to the program length, or might have had the urge to slack during the initial courses. Little did we know that we would eventually “SPLASH” (as one friend of mine kept miscalling the program name for some reason) right on our faces ... but eventually picked ourselves up and caught up with the material because a tumultuous Lebanon breeds a resilient citizen, nevertheless, a resilient clinical dietitian, physician, nurse, researcher, and scholar.

We were all given the chance to join a prestigious program, a program that’s funded by the National Institute of Health, modeled on the clinical effectiveness program at Harvard School of Public Health, and endorsed by Ivy-League universities such as Yale, who made the SHARP diploma a requirement as part of its own program under its medical school!.....so, definitely no pressure there guys, whatsoever 😊.

Nevertheless, knowing the weight of SHARP, we still applied. Some of us even had to apply twice or even three times to eventually get accepted. We went along with the courses despite some of our demands as full-time employees, full-time practitioners, full-time marriage, or full-time parents, while taming our imposter syndrome that was felt especially by those students who weren’t physicians amongst a predominated cohort of medical doctors and residents. Eventually, the psychological warfare faded away, we all adapted, and we all became friends, lifting one another whenever the other slacked a bit and needed support the most, which was felt during our evolving group projects. We were a cohort that resonated Interprofessional Education of diverse and engaging practitioners and scientists that broke the silos of healthcare, and we should be proud of that as breaking the “healthcare silos” through interprofessional collaboration is the next best thing in healthcare practice!

We owe it to the teaching faculty, instructors, and of course dedicated staff of SHARP. We also owe it to our spouses, significant others, children, and friends for bearing with us throughout this journey. To our parents, no matter where you are right now, we hope that you’re proud!

As we approach the beginning of the end to the COVID-19 pandemic, our promise is aiming to restore the balance in favor of health research in NCDs. We plan to contribute to the steering of the ‘research shift’ towards clinical research in NCDs by leading clinical and translational research projects, becoming involved in the development of national clinical practice guidelines and health policies, and providing the utmost patient care through the latest evidence-based practice. We do this, not just out of zeal, but due to our innate nature of refusing to be mere “research and clinical guidelines receivers” and instead create our own by contributing to the healthcare field. I believe that we were all raised to refuse following norms and conventions while transforming challenges into opportunities, which is precisely why we were adamant at joining SHARP. We intend to achieve our *raison d’être* in this life by becoming the best scientists needed to advance the healthcare agenda of NCDs in Lebanon and the MENA region.

Congratulations to us all and thank you!