

For Immediate Release



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**K2P Center at AUB, Ministry of Public Health, and Balsam – the Lebanese Center for Palliative Care collaborate to integrate palliative care into the health system in Lebanon: Palliative care is a right, not a luxury**

In Lebanon, the rates of non-communicable diseases and the rapidly aging population are increasing making “Palliative Care” an essential component of health services needed to relieve the suffering of patients. Recent estimates from 2017 show that 15,000 patients can benefit from palliative care services each year and the demand is only expected to increase.

What is Palliative Care and why is it needed in Lebanon?

World Health Organization (WHO) defines palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

According to evidence from high quality local and international studies compiled by the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB), palliative care is associated with improved patient outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and improved quality of life. However, palliative care services in Lebanon are not accessible to a wide range of patients due to barriers at the organization, system, professional, and patient levels.

Due to the significance of the problem and the right of all patients to access palliative care, the K2P Center at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB) collaborated with the Ministry of Public Health and Balsam - the Lebanese Center for Palliative Care and held a K2P Policy Dialogue to develop an action plan aiming at “Integrating Palliative Care into the Health System in Lebanon” at Rotana Gefinor, Beirut. The initiative was partially funded by a grant from SoUK.lb a program funded by the British Embassy in Lebanon and implemented through DAI, AlFanar, and AltCity Impact.

The K2P dialogue convened key stakeholders including the General Director of the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Walid Ammar, Dr. Hibah Osman, the Founder of Balsam, Dr. Raymond Sayegh, the President of the Lebanese Order of Physicians, Dr. Sleiman Haroun, President of Syndicate of Hospitals, Dr. Myrna Doumit, President of the Lebanese Order of Nurses, Dr. Michel Daher, the Professor of Clinical Surgery at Saint Georges University Hospital, Dr. Salah Zein El Dine, Executive Director of Balsam-The Lebanese Center for Palliative Care, Dr. Salam Jalloul, the Medical Director of “SANAD”, Mrs. Lubna Izzidine, founder of “SANAD” Dr. Marie - Claire Antakly, Head of Palliative Care Unit at Hotel-Dieu de France, Dr. Joseph Otayek, Founding Partner at Apis Health Consulting Group, in addition to academicians, researchers and leaders in the healthcare industry.

The dialogue was supported by a K2P Policy Brief, which brings together the best available local, regional and international evidence, and offers policy elements and implementation considerations. The Policy Brief was circulated to all related policymakers and stakeholders, prior to the dialogue, to inform the discussion and allow an active and focused discussion.

K2P Director, Dr. Fadi El Jardali highlighted: ‘we had great insightful discussions today among high profile stakeholders and decision makers who referred to high quality evidence from the K2P Policy Brief when discussing ways to integrate this much needed service and basic human right into the health system in Lebanon.’ Dr. Hibah Osman, the founder of Balsam highlighted that “this initiative aimed to bring together key players in the Lebanese health care system to discuss priorities and set a strategy for the growth and development of palliative care and the ultimate integration of this essential component of care of the seriously ill into the Lebanese healthcare system.”

Dialogue participants deliberated over four evidence-informed policy elements from the Policy Brief:

- Element 1: Integrate palliative care services within healthcare facilities
- Element 2: Provide palliative care at patient’s residence
- Element 3: Strengthen education and training in palliative care among healthcare professionals
- Element 4: Improve public awareness about palliative care

Participants stressed the necessity to rapidly respond to the rising demand for palliative care services for children, adults, and elderly.

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## Note to Editors

### About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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