

For Immediate Release



AUB launches first national study on dementia in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon- 17/02/2012 - Almost 10 percent of the Lebanese population is older than 65, effectively putting them at greater risk for dementia. Yet, the country lacks the social and healthcare policies to meet the challenges of caring for those with the aging-related disease.

That's why a group of researchers from the American University of Beirut have joined forces with others from Denmark and the United Kingdom to launch the first national study on dementia, with funding from the US National Institutes of Health and National Institute on Aging. Study results are expected to be out within a year.

The launch was held at AUB in the afternoon of February 16, 2012, under the patronage of Lebanese Health Minister Ali Hassan Khalil and in the presence of Danish Ambassador Jan Top Christensen and US Ambassador Maura Connelly, WHO representative Dr. Sameen Siddiqi and UNDP country director Seifeldin Abbato.

Professor Monique Chaaya from the AUB Department of Epidemiology and Population Health is leading the study together with Professor Gunhild Waldemar from the Danish Dementia Research Center in Denmark with the collaboration of Professor Samir Atweh from the Division of Neurology, AUB Medical Center, Lilian Ghandour, assistant professor of epidemiology from AUB and Professor Martin Prince from the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, UK. Dr. Kieu Phung from the Danish Dementia Research Center is the study coordinator.

The study will provide a reliable estimate of the number of people suffering from dementia in Lebanon and a systematic assessment of their needs, explained Chaaya. Additionally, the information collected on risk and protective factors for dementia will be essential for planning future prevention strategies in Lebanon.

This study is part of the 10/66 Dementia Research Group (DRG), an international network of researchers who have successfully carried out population-based studies into dementia in 11 low and middle income countries during the last decade. The long-term goal is to conduct a study comprising 2500 people older than 65 years randomly selected from all governorates of Lebanon to provide knowledge about the incidence, prevalence, risk and protective factors specific to the Lebanese population, and the barriers to treatment and care for people with dementia in Lebanon. The study is currently in the exploratory phase with two specific aims: to evaluate the 10/66 DRG dementia diagnostic instrument in the Lebanese linguistic and cultural context and to carry out a pilot study in the Beirut and Nabatieh governorates.

Worldwide, the increasingly aging populations and the steep increase in occurrence of dementia with age have contributed to the steadily rising prevalence of dementia to epidemic proportions. In North Africa and the Middle East region, due to very rapid demographic aging, the number of people with dementia is expected to grow exponentially, 1.2 million people in

2010 rising to 2.6 million in 2030, an increase of 125 percent, the second fastest rate of increase in the world (World Alzheimer Report 2009). Among Arab countries, Lebanon has the highest percentage of adults older than 65, a figure estimated at 9.6 percent in a 2007 survey by the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics.

"Dementia is rarely acknowledged by the public as a disease," said Walid Ammar, the director-general of the Lebanese Ministry of Health. "Most consider it as a natural part of aging."

Ammar argued that dementia should be considered as a major cause of disability in later life and should be included with chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. "Through this study, we hope to raise awareness about dementia, reduce the stigma around it, and increase the demand for proper care for people with dementia," he said.

Danish Ambassador Jan Top Christensen lauded the collaboration between academia and civil society, saying that scientific knowledge creation and NGO implementation go hand-in-hand. AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal, Faculty of Health Sciences Dean Iman Nuwayhid, Professor Huda Zurayk, the director of the Center for Research on Population and Health, all highlighted the importance of the study, and noted its interdisciplinary nature.

Nuwayhid underscored the importance of academic-NGO collaboration, noting: "Without NGOs' contribution and implementation of the knowledge created by academic institutions, we will not be able to positively impact the quality of life of the general public."

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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