

For Immediate Release



## **AUBMC team receives \$250,000 grant to investigate the causes of breast cancer in Lebanon**

Beirut, Lebanon- 10/03/2011- A medical research team from the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) was awarded a \$250, 000 research grant by an International Scientific Committee, Ethnic Research Initiative (ERI), funded by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of the biggest multinational pharmaceutical companies."

Nagi El Saghir, professor of clinical medicine and director of the Breast Center of Excellence at the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute at AUBMC and Nathalie K. Zgheib, assistant professor of pharmacology and toxicology at AUBMC, together with a team of AUBMC physicians, are the recipients of the top research grant awarded on behalf of the International Steering Committee of ERI GSK.

The \$250,000 research grant was presented to El Saghir at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium in Texas in December 2010 for his proposal to study specific breast cancer gene mutations (BRCA 1 and BRCA 2) in ethnic Lebanese Arab women.

The participants in the research project are Drs. George Nemer, Arafat Tfayli, Monique Shaya, Ali Shamseddine, Muhieddine Seoud, Fady Geara, Ziad Salem, Jaber Abbas, Faek Jamali, Ghina Berjawi, Fouad Boulos and George Abi-Saad of the AUBMC.

At a press conference organized by GSK and AUBMC and held on March 9, 2011 at the Movenpick Hotel in Beirut, El Saghir noted that the main goal of the research project will be to determine the prevalence and clinical impact of BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 mutations on Lebanese women with breast cancer. More than 50 percent of Lebanese women diagnosed with breast cancer are found to be under 50 years old, unlike their counterparts in industrialized countries.

The project also aims to increase understanding for the reasons the disease affects women in Lebanon at an earlier age than in the industrialized world, added El Saghir.

While data on breast cancer occurrences is not readily available in the Arab world, the findings of the research project are expected to provide better early detection and prevention methods for women with a family history of this disease. "Early breast cancer detection strategies are very important," said El Saghir.

The representative of GSK in the Gulf and the Near East noted that GSK launched the Oncology International ERI in 2008 to support research that investigates the relationship between ethnicity and breast cancer development and prognosis in the Arab region.

"Our application was selected from among 113 screened letters of intent and 30 finalists from 29 different countries, as the top application to be awarded this top grant," said El Saghir.

ENDS

**For more information please contact:**

Maha Al-Azar, Media Relations Officer, [ma110@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ma110@aub.edu.lb), 01-353 228

## 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 more than 7,000 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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