6th Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance Conference

The 6th Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance (LPHA) Conference entitled “Health of Palestinians inside and Outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory” was held at the American University of Beirut on March 20-21, 2015. The Conference was jointly organized by the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut and the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University, and in collaboration with the Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance (LPHA). The LPHA was established in 2009 as a network of Palestinian, regional and international researchers, committed to the highest scientific standards in research on Palestinians. Over 220 participants attended the two-day conference with participants coming from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Europe, Canada and the United States.

In the Overview Session at the beginning of the conference, Dr. Graham Watt from the University of Glasgow and the Chair of the LPHA Steering Group, summarized the progress in the LPHA annual conferences since 2010 demonstrating a systematic increase in the number of abstracts submitted and accepted for presentation, an expanding involvement
of various types of institutions from the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and neighboring countries including universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and UNRWA, and a substantial contribution from young researchers to conference presentations and discussions.

The Overview Session continued with a keynote presentation given by Dr. Jennifer Leaning from Harvard University entitled: “The Cumulative Wounds of Ongoing Conflict: The Burden of War in Gaza as of fall 2014”, which summarized the findings of an independent medical fact-finding mission to the Gaza Strip at the end of 2014, focusing on the consequences of the Israeli attack on the Strip during the 50 day summer war of 2014. This presentation set the tone for the Conference’s consideration of various forms of Palestinian suffering and trauma resulting from occupation, war, and displacement, and of the urgent need to measure rigorously the health consequences of suffering and trauma as a first step to addressing them.

The conference included a total of 10 sessions with 27 oral presentations, and two poster sessions displaying a total of 56 posters. A final closing session was also held, which entailed reflections on the two day conference, and suggestions for the future activities leading to the next conference.
An especially rich feature of the conference was the time allowed in each session for participants in the audience to make comments and to discuss presentations with authors. During the poster sessions, participants mingled with presenters each standing in front of her/his poster, and also engaged in discussion with them about their displayed studies. These discussions were lively and beneficial and continued in coffee/tea and lunch breaks.
The participants were invited to a reception at the end of the first day in the grounds of the Olayan School of Business which they enjoyed despite the occasional rain. They were entertained by dances and songs of children from Beit Atfal Al Somoud music group who brought a truly extraordinary experience.
The 6th LPHA Conference revealed once again the continued success of the LPHA annual conference in terms of the quality of presentations, relevance and significance of issues raised, the diversity of the audience attracted, and the engagement of participants with issues presented. The Conference continues to address the urgent question of Palestinian health under occupation in the GazaStrip and the West Bank, as well as in refugee camps in neighboring countries. It aims to build capacity and provide the evidence that can make the effects of occupation and displacement on health visible for policymaking, programming, and advocacy that enhance Palestinian health and well-being.

A moment of happiness