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## EDITORIAL

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### COVID-19 PANDEMIC-THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT-MEDICAL CENTER

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A whole new situation has arisen with the COVID-19 pandemic. A situation that can be described as the biggest challenge to the medical community in modern history. A situation that took us by surprise and for which we had limited preparation and knowledge. In a very short period of time we had to rise up to the challenge and organize our ranks to face this unprecedented health crisis. To date, more than 9 million cases are declared worldwide.<sup>1</sup> The death toll exceeded 475000 and healthcare systems are crumbling under the weight of the devastating consequences of the pandemic.

Beside its direct effect, the plague also impacted regular medical care. We have seen our hospital admission rates plummeting, our elective surgeries plunging and our emergency department visits dropping. The sanitary crisis rapidly evolved into an unparalleled economic crisis jeopardizing the whole medical sector locally, regionally, as well as worldwide.

Yet, we were under the pressure to preserve the quality of our services while adapting to the new threats and challenges of the pandemic. We had to make sure that health care providers delivered uninterrupted services without jeopardizing their safety.

Amidst what looked like chaos in the beginning, the leadership at our institution had to rapidly cope with the new defies and work at many different fronts:

- 1- Mitigate the economic crisis manifested as loss in revenue and increase in expenses related to the pandemic.
- 2- Secure preparedness plans across the medical center: in the emergency rooms, operating rooms, different hospital wards, as well as the newly created *Pandemic Evaluation Clinic and Center (PECC)*.
- 3- Address the consequences of the pandemic on the wellbeing of the AUB community with the rising levels of stress and uncertainties.
- 4- Maintain our mission as a teaching and research institution.

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In this issue of the *Middle East Journal of Anesthesiology* we will share with the reader how the COVID-19 crisis unfolded into a comprehensive preparedness plan. The different aspect of this plan will be discussed by the experts who were part of this enterprise. This issue will address topics such as, institutional response,<sup>2</sup> organizational and preparedness plans,<sup>2</sup> protocols of the different clinical areas,<sup>3-10</sup> wellbeing programs and stress management plans,<sup>11</sup> as well as the management of personal protective equipment amidst the international shortage crisis.<sup>12</sup>

This endeavor was a perfect example of swarm leadership where every single stakeholder stepped up to the challenge, embraced it and delivered in a record short period of time a polished product tailored to the needs of the community. Our mission as a teaching institution was positioned at the core of our efforts. A quasi immediate shift to online teaching was adopted. Our residency training programs, as well as medical students teaching activities were reorganized and adapted to online platforms. The IT department and our

administrative staff provided an outstanding support. Core faculty and trainees demonstrated amazing adaptation abilities and preserved an environment conducive to learning despite all the hurdles. As every obstacle can be transformed into an opportunity, COVID-19-related research projects also flourished and provided new prospects to AUB researchers.

This pandemic is likely to stay with us for a longer than expected period of time. Past the first wave of immediate responses, we will have to deal with the long term consequences of this extraordinary pandemic. As one example, health care facilities will soon have to accommodate a huge backlog when restrictions are lifted.

We cannot lower our guard just yet. The acute and immediate responses to the crisis need to give way to a dynamic process of ongoing adjustments. This fluid situation is going to be our new norm for an undetermined period of time.

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