

Distinguished guest speaker Dr. Raül de Velasco,

Dr. Thalia Arawi, Founding Director of the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 8th National Conference of the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program at the American University of Beirut, Faculty of Medicine in joint sponsorship with Yale University: Empathy in Medicine: Good or Bad?

Today's activity highlights the significant role of the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program in cultivating humanistic values in our medical students, residents, fellows, attending physicians and healthcare providers. This role becomes crucial at the time when technology is becoming increasingly integrated in our every day activity particularly medical practice. Nowadays, robots are assisting in surgical procedures and to some extent making diagnosis/treatment decisions and enabling doctors to visit patients remotely. Nothing can replace the human interaction between a doctor and a patient.

There is concern that empathy significantly declines during medical school, residency and on into a doctor's career. At AUBMC, we started initiatives for our medical students, residents and staff to develop life-long habits of empathy to become highly proficient in both the scientific and the humanistic aspects of medical practice.

One of the main pillars of our AUBMC 2020 Vision established by the Vice President for Medical Affairs and Dean of the Medical School Dr. Mohamed Sayegh and the team is to provide patients with the highest standards of patient-centered care, quality and safety, partnered with service, excellence through relentless focus on understanding the patient and his/her changing needs. A dedicated unit was established to patient satisfaction (Patient Affairs) with new programs, roles and processes to allow for the proactive and timely response to patient needs. New programs have been established recently at AUBMC with teams of dedicated healthcare professionals working to fulfill the patients' medical and emotional needs; Pain Management and Palliative Care programs are examples of such programs, in addition to comprehensive care programs in subspecialties.

There is a long-standing tension in the physician's role; on the one hand doctors strive for detachment to reliably care for all patients regardless of their personal feelings, yet patients want genuine empathy from their physicians.

Today's program and presentations will shed light on the importance of empathy in medical practice; fluctuations, barriers, measurements, up-regulation through education, practical issues and other aspects. Patients visit doctors and healthcare professionals seeking help and hope, and our goal should be to instill the art of medicine not just the science and technology. Hippocrates states "Where there is love of humanity, there is also love for the art of medicine".

On behalf of Dean Sayegh and the AUBMC medical administration, I would like to thank Dr. Raül de Velasco, Dr. Thalia Arawi, Dr. Khairat Habbal, Dr. George Abi Saad and the organizers of this conference for their efforts and contributions. I would like to thank the founders, staff and supporters of the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program at the AUB Faculty of Medicine for the leading role and pioneering in addressing bioethical issues in Lebanon and the region at a time when there is tremendous pressure making it difficult to focus on it.

Thank you.

Dr. Hassan El-Solh
Chief of Staff (AUBMC)