

Dear Colleagues and friends:

It with pleasure that I welcome you to the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism 7th National Conference. The theme of this conference is a very important one as it tackles the very heart of the profession of medicine.

Sick persons are in an exceptionally dependent, worried, and vulnerable condition. They are forced to unravel their weaknesses, compromise their dignity, and disclose intimacies of body and mind. This is precisely why medicine is a unique profession that compels the physician to practice medicine having the best interest of the patient in mind. Being a moral endeavour, the profession of medicine functions within a certain moral decorum yet, this moral decorum remains frail and wanting if it is not supported by empathy. Empathic bedside manners are the cement that tightens the physician-patient relationship and harbors trust which is the heart of medicine. Empathic bedside manners are not old-fashioned relics of the past. Indeed, they are universal and eternal just like sickness is and just as the desire to be whole again is. It is precisely because of the existential nature of illness that the physician's attitude and behavior influence every aspect of medical care for patients and their families. Thus, while one might argue that medicine is *taught*, I argue that empathy is *awakened*; for it is present in almost every person (perhaps with a few exceptions).

This is a very interesting and crucial topic in medical practice. We have so many things to talk about and little time. Having said that, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr. Raul De Velasco for being with us today and sharing his expertise as a physician-philosopher who, with his patients, "lived" the importance of empathy in medicine. So without further ado, I thank you all for being here and wish us all a fruitful conference.

Thalia Arawi