

Vice President Dr. Khaled Tabbara, colleagues and friends:

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our 8th Regional Bioethics Conference held by the SHBPP in collaboration with the Arabian Gulf University.

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Khaled Tabbara, Vice President and Acting Dean, College of Medicine at the AGU and Dr. Randah Hamadeh, Vice Dean for Graduate Studies and Research for hosting us and for their help and support in the organization of this conference. I also take this opportunity to congratulate AGU on its 35th anniversary and hope it will continue for many years to come to impact the gulf and the region. Many thanks go to our esteemed speakers who took time of their busy schedule to be with us in this conference.

Before we begin, allow me to share a few words about the Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program at the AUBFM-AUBMC.

The Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program (SHBPP) at the American University of Beirut Faculty of Medicine (AUB FM) is an interdisciplinary resource for faculty, students, healthcare providers and policy makers who are involved in bioethics education, research, and consultation in Lebanon and the region. Launched in April 2010, it is the first targeted initiative in the Arab World that seeks to educate, research, and champion issues related to professionalism, medical humanism and bioethics. Thus, the SHBPP aims at enhancing public awareness and understanding as well as scholarly work on contemporary issues related to bioethics, humanism and professionalism. It promotes and encourages the development of the requisite skills, attitudes, and behaviors among those who practice medicine on issues such as end of life care, medical economics, health administration, law and policy, and ethics and research in Lebanon and the Arab World.

This year's conference is entitled "Stem Cells: Promises and Controversies". As we all know, stem cell research is now on the fore front. It offers great promise for understanding basic mechanisms of human development and differentiation, as well as the hope for new treatments for diabetes, spinal cord injury, Parkinson's disease, myocardial infarction and now autism, to mention but a few. However, human stem cell research also raises sharp ethical, religious and political controversies which we cannot afford to brush aside any longer. Such issues need to be addressed along with scientific challenges in order to ensure that stem cell research is carried out in an ethically appropriate manner. Stem cell research is developing at a rapid pace in the West and we can now say that it is also taking place in the Arab World, the cradle of medicine, science and ethics. Thus, it is important for all those involved in research to consider how, if at all, will the potential health benefits contribute to our flourishing as a human race. We need to see this in the context of the human condition, the human good and human dignity.

I will share with you now a news-story, a 'fresh from the news' medical breakthrough footage and would then invite Mr. Abdallah Bucheery thanking him for agreeing to share with us his

personal experience as an MS patient undergoing stem cell treatment. I wish us all a fruitful conference.