

I would like to welcome you to this symposium on Behalf of Dr. Mohamed Sayegh, Vice President and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at AUB, who could not be present with us because of prior travel commitments. We could not have changed the date of this symposium to accommodate Dr. Sayegh's travel plans because it had to be on September 18, and for the first time in Lebanon we are celebrating the Global Medical Ethics Day, which also falls on the day the World Medical Association was established.

I am sure that all of you believe that medical ethics is a very important topic. I am happy to tell you that all medical schools in Lebanon, not to mention many other important bodies, are aware of this fact. When we first contacted the Deans of the 7 medical schools in Lebanon last month to organize this symposium, the response was positive and immediate. Some of them were on summer vacation.

It is true that Codes of ethics are becoming more and more important as medicine and science progress, and not only to heal and comfort the sick. Medical sciences are knocking at the very roots of Life itself. But Ethics have always been at the heart of the profession, ever since the days of Hippocrates. Every action of a physician with a patient is governed by ethical principles. Important as this may be, medical schools and for a long time thought that students would learn the principles of ethics "by osmosis". Luckily, this is changing.

We are all aware of the importance of medical ethics, but what about Global Medical Ethics Day? I will not embarrass you with the question of how many have heard of Global Medical Ethics Day. Even Google will give you only 18 hits, and in effect they are only two. This Day is the product of the World Medical Association which it established in 2003 to mark their founding day (back in 1947) and “to highlight and promote the presence of ethics in medicine”. One year later in September of 2004 the AMA followed suite in celebrating the Day. The AMA Counsel on Ethical and Judicial Affairs said “global Medical Ethics Day will draw the attention of physicians and the general public to one of the defining characteristics of medicine as a profession. It shows that we’re guided by a code of ethics that governs our relationship with other physicians and, most importantly, with our patients. Ethics is not only the heart of our profession; it is its health as well”. The AMA celebrated the day with a nation-wide awareness campaign and a drive to collect stethoscopes for world doctors and professionals who do not have them.

This symposium in Lebanon (and the credit should go to Drs Ramzi Sabra who is assistant Dean for undergraduate studies, and Thalia Arawi our coordinator of medical ethics at AUB) is not a nationwide campaign. But we thought this year to celebrate it with the rest of the Medical Schools in Lebanon, with the aim of exchanging views on how best to teach medical ethics to our students. We all realize that an important topic such as ethics cannot be taught in a passive way. Despite the pressure of teaching an ever-growing body of knowledge to medical students, our trainees should also have the advantage of being ready to face the many ethical challenges brought about by the expanding knowledge and technology. We do not want

our students to be like Lebanese drivers who own the best cars but drive on roads with no lanes. We will also gain in this symposium from the knowledge of a person who has experience in the field of Medical Ethics, Dr. Philip Rosoff, the director of Clinical Ethics at Duke University Hospital.

We hope in the future to celebrate this Day again in different ways that would expand the circle to include students, practitioners, hospital staff, organizations and the public at large, which will improve awareness and educate the public about our commitment to the most ethical practices as well as to the best science we know.

There is one more added gain from a conference like this which brings together all the medical schools in Lebanon. I am not sure how often we met to discuss curricular issues to the betterment of our students and of our common standards. With the increasing number of medical schools in Lebanon, this becomes a must. We all are proud of our Universities in Lebanon and the graduates we produce. But to remain at the forefront of Medical Education and at a time that medical schools are mushrooming all around us in the Middle East, we should cooperate to keep improving our education standards.

I welcome you all, and wish you a successful symposium.

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