

**President Fadlo R. Khuri**

## **SHARP's 5th Certificate Ceremony**

**July 28, 2017**

Good evening, I am really delighted to be able to be with you on this occasion where we can celebrate what you have accomplished in the Scholars in Health Education Program. Make no mistake about it you have accomplished a lot with your mentors and as you have indicated with your families supporting you. This a critical and intensive, I'm sure intensive is a minor description of your experience, seven-week summer course that is going to give you tools that you will be able to use in biomedical research and capacity building for decades. I can tell you that this is the sort of opportunity that you will look back on in 15, 20 and 30 years and be very glad you did this. These are the kinds of transformative opportunities that universities are supposed to provide and that this particular University was really founded to create. AUB's health footprint is still in evolution. We are involved in major issue of capacity building in public health in a region where that capacity is really woefully undervalued. I saw data from Dr. Huda Zurayk today that we have one PhD program in Alexandria in public health in the entire region, and where while schools of medicine have started to proliferate the number of high quality schools of medicine is unfortunately rare. So over the last few weeks we have announced our intent to establish a Health Sciences Complex that will probably get done some time after I'm in a retirement home, but nonetheless the mission is to create a hub for capacity building for Lebanon and the Arab world. The idea is to bring together our various schools, our institutes, our strengths, and our needs, into a large umbrella that will be able to take advantage of individuals like you who have the ability to take us to the next level. As the health researchers of the future, we are looking to today's SHARP graduates to play their part in the transformative discovery, innovation, service and excellence that our vision encompasses.

This is a unique summer experience. It is designed to give you the initial skills to conduct clinical and translational research, to engage with a diverse pool of students and you are certainly diverse from multiple relevant disciplines. We have a Pharm.D and a nurse, and physicians from all over. But most importantly I would argue to advance the health care agenda of NCDs in the region. This is a region of the world that is undergoing an epidemic in terms of non-communicable diseases. Diabetes in the Arab world is simply staggering. We look at Lebanon today and we are stunned, but most of us would say not surprised, that Lebanon has the longest duration of life of any Arab country and one of the reasons is people have to walk, they have to get out, they have to go and fetch things, whereas in many of our sister and brother nations, people are either stuck struggling with their TV remote or far worse struggling under siege or starvation or far worse conditions. So the skills you are acquiring are actually vital to the advancement of our society. You are getting skills in the principles of epidemiology, and responsible conduct, basic biostatistics, an ability to search of bibliographical medical and health-related databases to pluck out what the relevant articles are; you are learning statistical analysis, trial design, ethical clinical conduct, research ethics and so many other key things. I have to commend you on your accomplishment and wish you every success in your future training, teaching and practice.

As I stand here today, 28 years after I got into the field of medicine, I have to remark the pursuit of health as a career is part science, part history, part humanism and a roadmap of discovery. I know from my experience that every day of this career is worthwhile and exciting and innovative; but never easy. And I am struck by the words of the only person I know of to win Nobel Prizes in two disciplines, Marie Curie--I've been reading more and more of her life and her career and it reminds

me that what she said resonates more so today than ever before, when she said, “I was taught that the way of progress was neither swift nor easy”.

So my charge to you is to enjoy the voyage. It is a long and hard one, and it can be windy. I am going to tell you a bit of my own path and some of the bizarre turns I took. I met Dr. El-Hajj Fuleihan in the most unusual of circumstances as I emerged from the OR after her husband had removed nodes from my neck. I was very happy to see her and my late father and more importantly my surgeon reassure me that, no I had probably eaten raw meat. I'd intended to be a physician-scientist building mouse models for cancer, but when someone noticed the gene that we were trying knock out and knock in beat us to the punch and published that the phenotype was normal healthy mouse, our project kind of crashed. I think Samia can relate in relevance. And when I told my lab mentor that I thought we should switch to try to knock out p53, which was the most common and remains the most common change in cancer, he laughed at me and said, I am losing both my [RO1s](#) and you want to compete with [Bert Vogelstein](#) and [David Lane](#), the two most funded people in cancer. Well, I changed labs and six years later we published the first clinical trial that successfully targeted p53 with an oncolytic virus and I was much more of a clinical investigator. My point there is not to say that anything I did is or is not relevant, but that your path will take many twists and turns. I'm sure Dr. Sibai and Dr. Dr. El-Hajj Fuleihan and Dean Nuwayhid and Associate Dean Samia Khoury can relate. Don't be upset about those twists and turns. The voyage is an incredible one. You started with a set of tool that most people don't have. You are armed to make a big difference in the most positive way in this part of the world. I want to congratulate you for your willingness to stretch yourselves and applaud your willingness to do this for the rest of your careers.

Thank you.