

The American University of Beirut Holds its Third Middle East Lung Cancer Congress: “Progress Toward Cure”

Beirut, June 30, 2021: The Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute (NKBCI) at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC), Faculty of Medicine, held its third Middle East Lung Cancer Congress, the only lung cancer focused conference in the region. Attended by the Minister of Public Health in Lebanon, Dr. Hamad Hassan, the conference aimed to raise awareness on the impact of smoking on lung health, and the necessity to establish a lung cancer-screening program that would help in detecting lung cancer at its early stages, along with improving patient outcomes and reducing mortality.

The third Middle East Lung Cancer Congress: “Progress toward Cure”, that took place on June 18-19, 2021, virtually, served as a platform to discuss recent advances in understanding the pathophysiology of lung cancer and enhance multidisciplinary collaboration between various specialties involved in the care of lung cancer patients. The attendees also reflected on the effect of cancer on patients’ lives, and they explored the new treatment methodologies required at every stage of the cancer patient’s journey.

Organized by the Continuous Medical Education Office at AUB, the congress was endorsed by the Lebanese Society of Medical Oncology (LSMO), the Lebanese Pulmonary Society, the Lebanese Society of Pathology, the Lebanese Society of Family Medicine, and the Lebanese Society of Radiology. It was attended by medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, pulmonologists, academic scientists, residents, fellows, nurses, pharmacists, researchers, postgraduates, trainees, medical students, industry professionals and patient advocates.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Lebanese Minister of Public Health in Lebanon and led by Dr. Arafat Tfayli, Director of Clinical Research at Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute and Director of the 3rd Middle East Lung Cancer Conference, Dr. Ali Taher, Director of the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute (NKBCI), Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, and Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB President.

On this occasion, his Excellency Dr. Hamad Hasan said: “We witnessed huge challenges since the COVID-19 outbreak and our medical teams in Lebanon have been on the frontlines since the beginning of the pandemic, and we hope to fight lung cancer the same way.” Dr. Hassan stressed on the necessity for a strict tobacco control policy and mentioned that unemployment is one of the main reasons behind the high smoking rates among the youth. He also added: “The Lebanese Ministry of Public Health has recently launched a smoking cessation campaign, and we need to join hands and share our expertise in order to modify the existing regimens at the MOPH and improve our healthcare system.”

Dr. Fadlo Khuri said: “Many events happened in the past two years like the COVID-19 pandemic, the August blast and air pollution, that badly affected our lung health. Thus, it is our responsibility to find and implement solutions to improve access to cancer care in current times when poverty is increasing in Lebanon.”

In his opening speech, Dr. Arafat Tfayli, addressed the 500 attendees: “Holding the annual meeting for lung cancer in Lebanon despite all the economic and political turmoil we are going through is due to the fact that lung cancer is currently the number one killer for both men and women among all types of cancers, it is also, most probably, the most preventable one.” Dr. Tfayli added, “Our society is still riddled with an epidemic scale of tobacco consumption that ranks among the top countries in the world in addition to the COVID-19 epidemic that brought new challenges for cancer care and prevention. And to this effect, we announce the launching of the National Multidisciplinary Lung Cancer tumor board. Established by NKBCI and AstraZeneca, oncologists from all over the country can upload and discuss their difficult lung cancer cases at our thoracic tumor board held weekly.”

Moreover, with tobacco consumption being a more silent epidemic that kills an equal number of people year after year, Dr. Tfayli also addressed Dr. Hasan regarding the need to establish a comprehensive national lung cancer screening program as prevention remains the most important aspect of lung cancer control.

From his side, Dr. Ali Taher asked all concerned physicians to stress on and no longer postpone the pressing need for lung cancer screening for every eligible patient visiting their clinics. He also emphasized that numerous initiatives have been done at a national level to raise awareness on smoking cessation, but no national mass screening programs have been implemented so far.

Dr. Ghazi Zaatari stated that holding this conference for the third year in a row highlights the continuous dedication of the organizing team to progress in sharing expertise, adopting new methodologies of lung cancer treatment, and improving patient outcomes.

Organizing the Third Middle East Lung Cancer Congress is part of NKBCI’s mission to reduce the burden of cancer in Lebanon and the region through the application of state-of-the-art medical knowledge and technology and the development of integrated and advanced programs in patient care, research, education, and prevention. It is important to continue to call for action towards smoking cessation, screening for lung cancer, and to keep up with all updates in terms of innovative treatment modalities that can help increase survivorship of lung cancer patients.

This conference reflects AUBMC’s continuous efforts to raise the level of excellence in the healthcare system and serve as a hub in Lebanon and the region for ongoing medical education and research.

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About AUBMC

Since 1902, AUBMC has been providing the highest standards of care to patients across Lebanon and the region. It is also the teaching hospital for the Faculty of Medicine at AUB (established in 1867), which has trained generations of medical students and physicians, and whose graduates can be found at leading institutions around the world. AUBMC is the only medical institution in the Middle East to have earned the five international accreditations of JCI, Magnet, CAP, ACGME-I and JACIE attesting to its superior standards in patient-centered care, nursing, pathology/laboratory services and graduate medical education.

The Faculty of Medicine has graduated over 4,000 medical students and physicians; the Rafic Hariri School of Nursing provides excellent education for the nursing staff, and the Medical Center meets the healthcare needs of over 360,000 patient visits annually.

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