

For Immediate Release



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NEJM publishes an expert review on beta-Thalassemia **led by Dr. Ali Taher from AUB**

The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM), the leading medical journal worldwide, recently published an expert review on beta-Thalassemia, authored by Dr. Ali Taher, Professor of Clinical Hematology-Oncology and Director of the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute, at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC).

Expert reviews in the NEJM are meant to serve as an essential educational resource and guide for clinicians worldwide, and they are usually written by top global experts in the respective field, by invitation from the Editor in Chief. It has been 15 years since the NEJM last published a review on beta-Thalassemia, and the fact that Dr. Taher was selected to lead this initiative speaks a lot about the global medical community's trust in the experts at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and its medical center, who have proven themselves as leaders of global research projects and initiatives.

The New England Journal of Medicine is recognized as the world's leading medical journal and website for delivering high-quality, peer-reviewed research and interactive clinical content to physicians, educators, researchers, and the global medical community.

Dr. Taher's expert review particularly focuses on new understanding and definitions as well as data from novel therapies that helped reshape outcomes and transform the life of patients with thalassemia. It was based on extensive collaboration and leadership of projects with regional and global experts like Professor Maria Cappellini, co-author on the article, and this collaboration has helped transform thalassemia from an orphan disease, to one that received great attention by medical societies and global research institutes. Another co-author of the article, Dr. Khaled Musallam, a former medical student at AUB, showed unmatched promise in research development and went on to lead a prolific research portfolio to become a global key opinion leader in his own right.

Thalassemia is a genetic blood disorder that is highly prevalent in the Mediterranean region, Middle East, and South East Asia. It is also becoming a public health concern in Europe and the US in view of recent population migrations. Affected patients have low capacity to produce hemoglobin, a key component in human red cells responsible for oxygen delivery to the whole body. In the majority of thalassemia patients, lifelong blood transfusion therapy becomes the only way to survive – and this puts a great burden on both the patient and the healthcare system.

Dr. Taher's interest in thalassemia started in his early training days in London; and when he came back to Lebanon, this interest transformed into a dedicated research career considering the high number of patients in the country and the region. He established what has now become a world-renowned thalassemia research program, at AUB and in collaboration with the Chronic Care Center (CCC) where the majority of thalassemia patients are cared for in Lebanon.

The objective of Professor Taher's research program was to bring the medical community to a clearer understanding of the disease and develop new therapies that improve patient outcomes; all featured in the NEJM article. He led several global trials that resulted in FDA approvals of iron chelators, drugs that help the body getting rid of the extra iron that accumulates from chronic transfusions – which can otherwise be fatal to thalassemia patients. He is also now leading several clinical trials that evaluate novel therapies aimed to decrease or abolish the need for transfusions altogether. Prof. Taher was also among the first to recognize and study a subgroup of patients who have thalassemia but do not necessarily require transfusions. His work uncovered key clinical findings and management needs in this patient subgroup and earned him a PhD from the Leiden University Medical Center. During the past few years, his work reshaped the way we understand and manage thalassemia today, and this translated in the development of new management guidelines published by the Thalassemia International Federation under his leadership.

Currently, Dr. Taher ranks in the Top 100 of the world's most productive authors in Hematology (in the past 10 years), Top 5 of the most published authors in the Arab world (2012 to present) and among the top in the world in publications on Thalassemia and Iron Chelation Therapy.

Recently, Dr. Taher has rated top expert in 3 fields: Anemia, beta-Thalassemia, and Iron Overload according to Expertscape and in November 2020, an international study by Stanford University produced a composite citation-based indicator and listed Professor Taher among the world's top 2% of scholars in his respective field.

Dr. Taher's ultimate passion is mentoring and sharing his knowledge with the young generation of physician scientists. Indeed, he is a role model who makes AUB and AUBMC pride in the difference his research, extensive work, and unique achievements have made throughout the years.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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