

For Immediate Release



AUBMC doctors make history with first toe-to-finger micro-reconstructive surgery in the country

Beirut, Lebanon- 22/03/2012 -Surgeons at AUBMC's Hand Surgery Center of Excellence recently made history after the success of the first microsurgical toe-to-finger transfer. The 15-year-old patient who underwent the sophisticated procedure reports he has sensation and movement in a digit that physicians at other hospitals sought to amputate.

Dr. Youssef Bakhach, in the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at AUBMC, reconstructed Samer's index finger that was badly injured in a fireworks accident earlier last year. "He lost the tip of his index and his finger was (void of skin)," explains Dr. Bakhach, "and because physicians here (in Lebanon) lack expertise in microsurgery and don't know that hand surgery specialty is available in the country, they did not think of other options."

"Because the hand is a very specific organ of the body with bones, joints, tendons, nerves, vessels and skin, hand surgery is a very specialized and specific surgery and the surgeon performing on the hand must have the required background," continues Dr. Bakhach.

Rather than amputating the patient's finger, Dr. Bakhach suggested toe-to-finger microsurgical transplantation. The young patient was quick to accept Dr. Bakhach's suggestion and just five days after his accident, he was admitted for the six-hour surgery. Similar in physiology to the tip of his index finger, the tip of his second toe was transplanted with its living nerves and vessels to his hand.

AUBMC's Hand Surgery Center of Excellence was established on three fundamental pillars: highly specialized surgeons, specialized infrastructure with specific material and instruments dedicated to operate on the small structures of the hand, and post-operative physical therapy services to restore normal motion to reconstructed hands and fingers. "Reconstructive microsurgery is a procedure by which a live part of the body, with its vessels, bones and tendons, is transplanted from one place to another," explains Dr. Bakhach.

Though Dr. Bakhach asserts that "it still needs some refinement to ameliorate the shape and function of the reconstructed finger," the patient has sensation in it again now, only four months after surgery.

"It's a miracle what he has now. It's excellent," says the patient's mother.

The teenager is the first among a number of patients whose fingers were saved with this sophisticated toe-to-finger micro-reconstructive surgery. The latest patient to receive the specialized treatment is a 34-year-old whose middle and ring fingers were destroyed by a blast injury. He is now recovering following a successful surgery that transferred two of his toes to his injured hand.

Serious defects caused by blast injuries are common in Lebanon as a result of the wars the country has endured and have been showing up more recently among refugees in Lebanon fleeing the wars in Syria and Iraq.

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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 420-bed hospital.

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