

For Immediate Release



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AUB launches the “WHO Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Research”
at the Third International Conference on Waterpipe Tobacco
Smoking Research

A ceremony to launch the World Health Organization (WHO) Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Research was held at AUB's West Hall in Bathish Auditorium during the “Third International Conference on Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking Research,” which was organized by AUB’s Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) in collaboration with the Syrian Center for Smoking Research, and supported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse in the United States.

The launching ceremony for this knowledge hub, which is the third of its kind in the world and the first in the Middle East, was attended by Dr. Alan Shihadeh, dean of the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at AUB, who represented AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri. The event was also attended by FHS Dean Dr. Iman Nuwayhid, Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, associate dean for faculty affairs at AUB’s Faculty of Medicine, chairperson of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at AUBMC, and director of the Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Research; and by Dr. Tibor Szilagyi, team leader of reporting and knowledge management of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Secretariat. Other researchers, experts, and stakeholders attended the launching ceremony as well.

In the beginning, a welcoming address was given by Dr. Rima Nakkash, FHS associate professor and chair of the Tobacco-Free AUB 2018 Task Force. She said: “It is our hope that with the support of all the concerned stakeholders, this knowledge hub meets its set objectives in assessing and disseminating the knowledge on waterpipe smoking through virtual platforms of informational exchange, organizing activities to share this information and experiences, and advising regulatory bodies on effective control measures to curb this growing epidemic.”

Dr. Zaatari then addressed the audience with his speech saying: “The knowledge hub here is for assessing the situation, sharing knowledge, creating platforms for exchange of this information,

holding workshops for regulators – we need to translate this – taking it from one level of knowledge to bring in effective regulations that will ultimately serve humanity. This is a very alarming situation here, and I am glad ultimately that today we are standing firm and with a strong drive in combating the horrible epidemic with yet another ugly face, which is the waterpipe, that has torn our communities and seriously harmed the wellbeing of our young generation.”

Dr. Shihadeh then spoke saying that “in the domain of tobacco control, AUB continues to lead, innovate, and serve.” He added: “Several years ago it became the first university campus in Lebanon to ban smoking except in designated outdoor areas. This January it will become entirely tobacco free, even in its off-campus venues. And it will be a very cold place for the tobacco industry, which will not be allowed to fund research, nor to recruit students through our career services, nor to promote products directly or indirectly on campus. Our cancer treatment center is over-flowing with the human collateral of the tobacco industry’s decades-long campaigns to hook more consumers, especially youth.”

In his turn, Dr. Szilagyi said that tobacco consumption is “by far the biggest cause of preventable death worldwide.” He also said that “the results of anti-tobacco measures have been uneven and that in the eastern Mediterranean region, including Lebanon, tobacco consumption remains stubbornly high.” Szilagyi then spoke about waterpipe smoking being evidently on the rise, especially among the youth, and not only in the Middle East but also in other parts of the world.

“This is an insidious threat and we have to take it very seriously indeed. Many users believe that water-pipe tobacco smoke is less harmful than smoke from cigarettes, suggesting we have a huge educational challenge ahead of us. We need to know more about this threat and its effects, and we need to spread the word beyond the region,” said Szilagyi. “We at the FCTC Secretariat are delighted to join hands with the AUB and help this project to become a reality. It allows the whole world to benefit from the expertise that AUB has developed over many years in this area.” He continued: “I can think of no better partner for this venture than the distinguished oncologist and AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, who has devoted his life to the fight against cancer.”

During the launching event, a video was presented highlighting the extensive and multidisciplinary research work on waterpipe smoking that was carried out at AUB for more than a decade qualifying AUB as WHO’s Knowledge Hub for Waterpipe Research.

The two-day International Conference on Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking Research at AUB was headlined "Translating waterpipe tobacco smoking research evidence into practice, policy and regulation." It brought world renowned researchers and experts on tobacco control, waterpipe smoking, and public health advocacy, together with policy makers, civil society organizations, and media, to share recent evidence on interventions aimed at combating waterpipe tobacco

smoking in Lebanon and globally; and to discuss obstacles and options in translating knowledge and evidence into policies and in enforcing them using the poor enforcement of Law 174 as an example. The participants acknowledged the need to build and strengthen international collaborations and partnerships. The conference was preceded by a one-day training workshop on implementation research which highlighted the important role of action-oriented research in supporting effective tobacco control policies and interventions. The workshop was organized by the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Drug Abuse in the US, and AUB.

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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 420-bed hospital.

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