

American University of Beirut Medical Center Launches the Substance Use Disorder Program

A New Initiative by the Department of Psychiatry

(March 11, 2015) Beirut, Lebanon – The Department of Psychiatry at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) has launched the Dr. Agnes Varis Healing Program for Substance Use Disorders (SUD) to treat all forms of addiction. The program, established upon receiving a generous gift from Dr. Agnes Varis trust, came as a response to the growing need in the Lebanese community for substance use disorder treatments especially after NGO and official statistics have shown a growing crisis and an increase in the number of Lebanese addicted to various substances in the past years.

“The growing crisis we are directly observing as medical professionals among all age groups and social/economic classes and regions in Lebanon motivated us to initiate such a program in the department,” said Dr. Farid Talih M.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Inpatient Psychiatry Unit at AUBMC. “The rates in Lebanon are almost comparable to numbers seen in developed countries. They certainly support the great need for such a healing program,” added Dr. Talih.

Substance use disorders (SUD) describe a problematic pathological overuse of one or more substances (legal or illegal), leading to a clinically significant impairment or distress. Substances involved can range from nicotine and alcohol to cannabis or other recreational drugs, as well as prescription medications (sedatives, sleeping pills, pain medications). Behavioral addictions such as gambling or internet/video game overuse might also become problematic and require treatment.

The program will work on providing the best possible, evidence based, humanistic care to a complex bio-psycho-social problem and support individuals and families who are dealing with the challenges of SUD.

“The program aims at raising awareness, promoting prevention, and reducing stigma toward SUD, and will provide any needed drug or alcohol testing on premises,” added Dr. Talih. It is an outpatient program that includes intensive psychological-based individual and group therapy. Individual initial assessments analyse the case at hand and recommend the appropriate treatment.

The basic program, which extends over a period of 4 weeks and does not require hospitalization, can be prolonged if needed. It is a multidisciplinary program that includes qualified and certified psychiatrists, experienced substance abuse counsellors and a specialized nursing staff. The program is also linked to other services in the Department of Psychiatry that can address medical detoxification needs (hospital based) and specialized psychological and psychiatric care for co-

morbid conditions. Treatment is flexible, and the team is able to offer long-term follow up after the program is concluded.

Any individual is at risk of developing a substance use disorder whose effects, if left untreated, are harmful to the physical and mental health. Early detection and treatment are critical.

“AUBMC has always been and will always be known for being a driver of change and promoter of health for the Lebanese public,” said Dr. Talih. “Launching another program at the Medical Center is just a response to the promise AUBMC 2020 Vision has given towards redefining patient care and elevating the health industry to a more advanced level,” concluded Dr. Talih.

The Substance Use Disorders Program is located in the Department of Psychiatry, 3rd Floor at AUBMC, Bldg. 56. To schedule an appointment, please call: 01-350000 ext. 5650 or email us at: pn09@aub.edu.lb or yf03@aub.edu.lb.

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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 three international accreditations of JCI, Magnet, CAP, and ACGME-I 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 health care needs of over 360,000 patient visits annually.

For more information, please visit our website www.aubmc.org or contact

The AUBMC Office of Communications at 0096 1 350000 ext. 4732

Rana Alley, Director of Strategic Planning and Communications 00961 1 350000 ext. 4722

Email: praubmc@aub.edu.lb

Ketchum Raad Middle East

Suzan Bou Dargham, Account Director – 00961 3 690505 – Email: suzan.dargham@ketchum-raad.com