



الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الصحة العامة



**Press Release: For immediate distribution**

## **AUBMC and Embrace Fund Launched Lebanon's First National Awareness Campaign for Suicide Prevention and Revealed Country's First Suicide Data**

One Person Every Three Days Dies by Suicide in Lebanon

**(September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014) - Beirut, Lebanon:** Under the patronage of the Ministry of Public Health and in the presence of his Excellency Minister Wael Abu Faour, the Department of Psychiatry and the Embrace Fund at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) launched today Lebanon's first National Awareness Campaign for Suicide Prevention. The press conference, held at Issam Fares Institute Building (Green Oval) – Auditorium at the American University of Beirut, witnessed the reveal of Lebanon's first suicide related data.

"Suicide is a serious public health problem that affects the whole community, said Dr. Ziad Nahas, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the American University of Beirut Medical Center.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 800,000 people die by suicide every year and around one person every 40 seconds. Suicide occurs all over the world and can take place at almost any age. It is the second leading cause of death in 15-29 year olds. For each adult who died by suicide, 20 others attempted it (WHO, 2014).

In its latest report on suicide prevention, the World Health Organization estimated that 43 deaths by suicide occurred in Lebanon in 2012 (WHO, 2014). However, official records for that same year reveal a serious discrepancy: 107 deaths by suicide were registered. Accordingly, someone dies from suicide in Lebanon every 3 days. Experts believe this number is an underestimation of the scope of the problem. Social, religious and legal aspects of the local culture bias the reporting of suicide cases.

A number of local studies have also highlighted the presence of suicidal ideation, a major risk factor for death by suicide. The Global School-based Student Health survey revealed that 15% of students aged 13 to 15 years in Lebanon seriously considered attempting suicide at one point in the 12 months prior (WHO, 2011). Two recent studies conducted by the AUBMC Department of Psychiatry (pending publication) also point to the urgency of attending to this problem. One found prevalent suicidal



ideation rate among healthcare workers in Lebanon. The other estimated that a third of psychiatric patients seeking treatment struggle with thoughts of self-harm.

“Suicide is preventable,” added Dr. Nahas. Ninety percent of suicide cases are a result of some form of mental illness that can be treated. Most people who attempt or commit suicide suffer from one or more treatable mental disorders, like depression, drug or alcohol dependence, and schizophrenia (WHO, 2014). In Lebanon, one out of every 4 individuals suffers from a mental disorder throughout their lives, but, only a minority obtains treatment (Karam et al., 2008).

The World Health Organization recommends a number of strategies for suicide prevention, including reducing access to the means of suicide, having responsible reporting by the media (i.e, not sensationalizing or glamourizing suicide) and strengthening community and social support. With this national campaign, Embrace Fund is taking a serious first step towards suicide prevention in Lebanon by starting a well-needed conversation around a taboo topic and a serious problem that affects us all.

“Being up to date with the latest in neurology and psychiatry is fundamental and considered to be one of the major pillars of the AUBMC 2020 vision in areas related to health care, scientific and academic research.” said Dr. Mohamed Sayegh, vice president of Medical Affairs and dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the American University of Beirut. “We launched in 2013 and in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health Lebanon's First National Mental Health Awareness Campaign and we are also working on the establishment of several centers excellence addressing specific diseases.” added Dr. Sayegh.

The campaign will include a series of elements to raise community awareness as a first step towards preventing suicide: a TV spot featuring His Excellency Minister of Health Wael Abu Faour; billboard ads; and “Into the Dawn” suicide memorial walk. The campaign will hold the slogan, “Akid Ra7 Fee2” (“I will surely wake up”), aiming at encouraging people to wake up early and join the walk at 5:00 am on September 21<sup>st</sup>. “It also calls upon them to pay attention to an alarming fact: Every three days, someone dies from suicide in Lebanon,” said Mrs. Michaela Nahas, Embrace Fund.

A unique event taking place at Raouche will accompany the campaign throughout the month of September. All proceeds raised from the walk will be directed towards funding a suicide hotline, a vital service that is currently non-existent in Lebanon.

In a short period of time since its launching in October 2013, Embrace Fund at AUBMC set in motion the first large scale media-driven National Mental Health Awareness Campaign in Lebanon “Fekko el 3e2de”, and began assisting underprivileged psychiatric patients in covering their treatment expenses.



الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الصحة العامة



“Join us this September as we embark on Embrace’s second national awareness campaign tackling the most severe consequence of mental illness— suicide,” concluded Dr. Nahas.

**End**

**For more information please visit our website [www.aubmc.org](http://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](mailto:praubmc@aub.edu.lb)

**Ketchum Raad Middle East**

**Suzan Bou Dargham, Account Director – 00961 3 690505 – Email: [suzan.dargham@ketchum-raad.com](mailto:suzan.dargham@ketchum-raad.com)**

#### **Note to Editors**

#### **About American University of Beirut Medical Center**

Since 1902, the American University of Beirut Medical Center has been the most trusted and respected healthcare provider in Lebanon and the region, handling more than 300,000 patient visits annually. AUB is building on its strong foundations in medical education and health care through the AUBMC 2020 Vision. In addition to improving facilities and capacity, the AUBMC 2020 Vision will establish centers of excellence that will provide new medical options for the treatment of illnesses endemic in the Arab world, and it will expand access to the quality of care that families in Lebanon have depended on for generations.

Launched in 2010, the AUBMC 2020 Vision is an ambitious and comprehensive initiative that affirms AUBMC’s position as the leading medical center and healthcare institution in the region. The AUBMC 2020 Vision is transforming medical education, research and practice, and most importantly, medical care in the region, bringing them to new levels of excellence. It consists of major new medical (clinical and academic) facilities, the establishment of clinical and research centers of excellence, investment in state-of-the-art equipment, recruitment of talented physicians and nurses, and regional and international partnerships. Read more at [www.aubmc.org/2020](http://www.aubmc.org/2020).

#### **References:**



الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الصحة العامة



Karam, E. G., Mneimneh, Z. N., Dimassi, H., Fayyad, J. A., Karam, A. N., Nasser, S. C., ... & Kessler, R. C. (2008). Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in Lebanon: First onset, treatment, and exposure to war. *PLoS Medicine*, 5(4), e61.

World Health Organization (2011). Global school-based student health survey: Lebanon 2011 Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: [http://www.who.int/chp/gshs/2011\\_GSHS\\_FS\\_Lebanon.pdf](http://www.who.int/chp/gshs/2011_GSHS_FS_Lebanon.pdf)

World Health Organization (2014). Preventing suicide: A global imperative. Retrieved from: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/131056/1/9789241564779\\_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/131056/1/9789241564779_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1)