



The Lebanese Center for Palliative Care - Balsam

المركز اللبناني للعناية التلطيفية - بلسم

Annual Report

2014

Letter from the Director

Dear friends and supporters,

Palliative care has seen some exciting developments in the past year. Most notably, the World Health Organization (WHO) passed a resolution last May calling on all countries to integrate palliative care into their national health systems. This puts palliative care high on the agendas of policy makers and should facilitate the efforts of people working to advance it worldwide.

When we first started providing home-based palliative care services in Beirut 5 years ago, most health providers were still not familiar with the concept or convinced of the benefits to their patients. Patients and families often felt that seeking palliative care was equivalent to “giving up” and losing hope. As a result many patients were referred to us in their final days or hours of life and were therefore not reaping the full benefits of Balsam care.

This year our patient referrals came from 58 different physicians. This is an increase from only 8 referring physicians 3 years ago, and 38 referring physicians in 2012. And although the number of patients admitted to our care is only 8% higher than in 2013, the number of patient-days has increased by 71%! Health providers are clearly recognizing the benefits of palliative care; and the dramatic increase in patient-days shows that patients are being referred to us earlier in the course of their illness and remaining in our care for a longer period. This shift to early referral reflects that both physicians and patients are more open to the concept of palliative care and appreciative of its benefits. It is also a clear tribute to the quality of the service we are providing.

Towards the end of 2014, we conducted a series of strategic planning activities to evaluate our work to date and define our strategy for the coming 3 years. Given the current health care environment, we have decided to continue to expand our patient care services to meet the growing needs of our population. However, we also plan to focus more of our efforts on advocacy and capacity building to make palliative care more accessible to people across the country. We will be working more closely with the Ministry of Public Health as well as national and international organizations to achieve this shared goal. We are working on several new and exciting initiatives, and we look forward sharing our progress with you in the coming years.

We are very proud of the good work that we are doing, and none of it would be possible without the generous support of our donors. We take this opportunity to thank each and every one who has made a donation to support our efforts. Specifically, we would like to thank Emirates Lebanon Bank S.A.L. for their continued support and their generous donations.

We encourage you to share this report with anyone who may be interested in learning more about Balsam and our efforts towards advancing palliative care in Lebanon.

Best Regards,

Hibah Osman, MD, MPH
Executive and Medical Director
March 1, 15

OUR MISSION

The Lebanese Center for Palliative Care- Balsam is a non-governmental organization that works to relieve suffering and improve quality of life of patients with serious illness. We provide holistic support to patients dealing with life-threatening illness by providing medical services as well as psychological, social, practical, and spiritual support within the family and home environment. We are committed to developing palliative care in Lebanon and ensuring that it becomes integrated into our healthcare system.

Our team includes:

Physician: Hibah Osman, MD, MPH



Clinical Psychologist: Michael Khoury, MD, MA



Physician: Daniel Sara, MD, MPH



Clinical Pharmacist: Dania Ghaziri, PharmD



Janane Hanna, RN, MSN, AOCNS



Outreach Coordinator: Jinane Abi Ramia, MPH



Rebecca El-Asmar, RN, MSN, AOCNS



Social Worker: Hiba Makke, MSW



Hiba AlShami, RN



Alia El Tabsh, RN



PATIENT CARE:

We use an interdisciplinary team approach to support patients and their families and encourage them to make informed decisions about their medical care that are in line with their values and belief system. We aim to prevent and relieve suffering and help patients maintain the best possible quality of life despite their illness.

We have been providing medical services primarily in the Greater Beirut area since 2010. Referrals can be made by a healthcare provider or can come directly from the patient or family. A member of the Balsam team performs an initial assessment to decide on the patient's palliative care needs. If patients can benefit from palliative care they are admitted to Balsam care. The Balsam team then develops a personalized care plan based on the patient's medical needs and their goals and wishes.

Patients are cared for by a registered nurse under the supervision of the physician. Our clinical psychologist and clinical pharmacist offer support to the nurses and physicians in the team to provide optimal care. Our social worker provides additional support to patients and families based on their psychosocial needs. The nurses conduct regular home visits to assess the patient and follow up on her/his care. They are available 24/7 for emergencies. The team continues to follow patients in case of hospitalization, and medical management is coordinated with the patient's primary treating physician. When a patient passes away, the Balsam team continues to support the family during the bereavement period for at least one year.

Patients who reside outside the Greater Beirut Area or who do not need our full package of services may receive "partial support". This could include provision of medical equipment, telephone support, or periodic home visits based on patient needs and our resources.

Our services are offered at no cost to ensure that they are accessible to anyone who may need them. We are funded exclusively by private donors.

Patient Statistics:

98 patients were admitted to Balsam care in 2014

- Average age: **73** (Range: **11 - 99** years)
- **54 %** were male
- **89 %** were Lebanese
- **77 %** had a cancer diagnosis

Table 1: Total number of patients in 2014

Year	Continuing from 2013		Admitted in 2014		Grand Total
Patients	14	4 full support	98	78 full support	82 Full support
		10 partial support		20 partial support	30 Partial support
					112

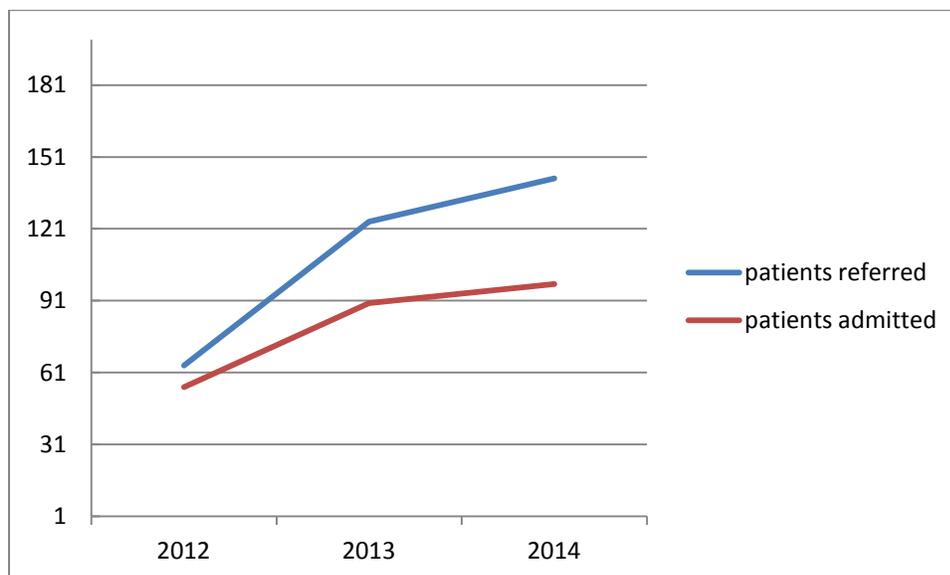


Figure 1: Admitted and referred patients – 2012 - 2014

Table 2: Days in care (2014)

Time	≤10days		11 – 30 days		1-3 months		3 -10 months		>10months		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Patients	24	21	29	26	24	21	24	22	11	10	112	100

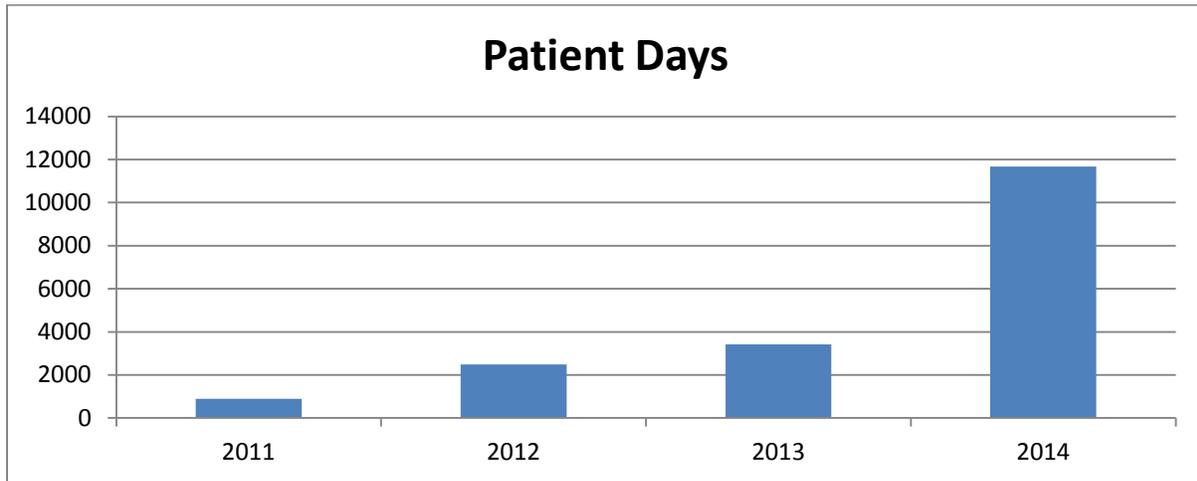


Figure 2: Number of Patient-Days (2011 – 2014)

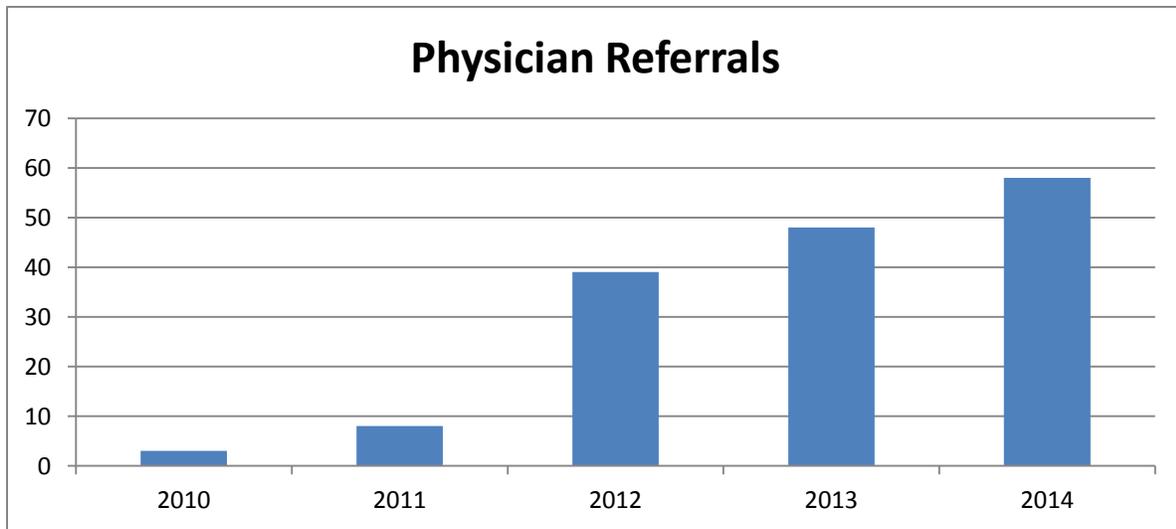


Figure 3: Number of referring physicians (2010 – 2014)

For more statistics on patient care please refer to the appendix

ADVOCACY

Over the past 5 years, we have seen a growing interest in and understanding of palliative care. However, the field remains relatively new to Lebanon and the need to increase awareness is essential to the growth and sustainability of the palliative approach. We continue to work on promoting palliative care at the community level as well as at the policy level and among healthcare providers. We aim to increase awareness about the philosophy and practice of palliative care through traditional mass media, social media, and community outreach activities.

Activities

Dr. Frank Ferris visit

Frank Ferris is an international palliative care expert who has played a role in the development of palliative care in over 30 countries. We had the pleasure of hosting him in Lebanon for one week in April in collaboration with the Lebanese Pulmonary Society and the Middle East Medical Assembly (MEMA) at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC). Dr. Ferris' visit was packed with activities that included training, awareness raising and advising at the national policy level.

The visit began with a 2-day **Leadership Training Workshop** targeting teams working to establish hospital-based palliative care programs in four hospitals around the country including AUBMC, Hotel Dieu de France (HDF), St. George Hospital and Ain WaZein Hospital. The 17 trainees included physicians, nurses and hospital administrators.

Dr. Ferris also contributed to a **workshop on the National Strategy** for the development of palliative care in Lebanon. The workshop included members of the National Committee on Pain Control and Palliative Care and was sponsored by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization.

He gave 2 lectures on palliative care and dyspnea at the **Annual Meeting of the Lebanese Pulmonary Society** as well as the **Khalil Abu-Feisal Memorial Lecture** at the **Middle East Medical Assembly (MEMA)**.

Dr. Ferris also contributed to teaching at AUBMC. He gave a **Grand Round on Nutrition and Hydration in Palliative Care** and lead a **Morning Report** activity in the **Internal Medicine Department**. He conducted bedside rounds with the Palliative Care Consultation Service at the hospital and attended the weekly meeting with the team contributing to both process and content.

Balsam hosted a lunch for medical students, residents and fellows who had expressed an interest in palliative care to allow them to meet Dr. Ferris. This was an opportunity for these physicians to discuss future careers in palliative care as well as potential training opportunities that would allow them to contribute to the field.

Balsam friend and supporter Raghida Ghandour Rahim hosted a lovely dinner in honor of Dr. Ferris at her home in Gemmayze. The dinner was attended by Director General of the Ministry of Public Health Dr. Walid Ammar and his wife May Awar and included members of the Balsam Board and several of Balsam's supporters and beneficiaries.

Dr. Ferris' visit was covered by the online palliative care news source **eHospice**, the Lebanese English daily newspaper **The Daily Star**, the Journal of Palliative Medicine's **Briefings**, Lebanon's **The Monthly** Magazine, and **LAHA** magazine.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Apr-28/254606-with-life-expectancy-rising-palliative-care-a-must-in-lebanon.ashx?src=iPhone#axzz317atbZnQ>

<http://www.ehospice.com/ArticleView/tabid/10686/ArticleId/10224/language/en-GB/View.aspx>

Dr. Eric Cassel visit

Dr. Cassell is a physician who has authored several books on suffering and the goals of medicine. He came to Lebanon with his wife Patricia Owens in September on a visit organized by Balsam and the **Salim El Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program** at the American University of Beirut.

The highlight of his visit was a **conference on Humane Medicine** that was held at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel on Saturday September 27th. In his lectures, Dr. Cassell focused on the **nature of healing** and how to approach **the suffering patient**. Dr. Osman also contributed to the conference with a **lecture on dignity and health**. The conference was attended in total by 83 professionals including physicians, medical students, nurses and allied health professionals from around the country.

During his visit Dr. Cassell attended and contributed to the weekly **Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)** Meetings at Balsam. He gave a lecture entitled "**How bioethics increases the pleasure of clinical medicine**" as part of the **Internal Medicine Grand Rounds at AUBMC** as part of their **Ethics Matters** lecture series.

Dr. Lama El Zein visit

Dr. El Zein is a family physician and palliative care specialist at **Columbia University** in New York. She attended our weekly **IDT meetings** and contributed to our activities during her stay. Over the years, Dr. El Zein has been supporting the development of palliative care in Lebanon by contributing to Balsam activities as well as the activities on the National Committee on Pain Control and Palliative Care.

Palliative Care established in AUBMC

Dr. Osman began working towards **establishing a palliative care program at the American University of Beirut Medical Center** in 2013. During her time at AUBMC, she set up and trained a multidisciplinary palliative care team. She also served on several committees and task forces and played an important role in developing policies that have made the hospital environment more responsive to the needs of patients with serious illness. The service was extremely well received by health providers, patients and their families. Demand for palliative care grew quickly and a positive impact on patients and the hospital was reported. The service complemented the work of other specialists and filled an important gap in the system. This was the **first palliative care initiative at AUBMC** and an obvious change in the culture of hospital has been noted. This work was done with the strong support and dedication of both the Balsam team and the Balsam Board.

Palliative Care Insurance Coverage in collaboration with Qudurat

Qudurat is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that plays the role of a match-maker between professionals (individuals and corporations) and NGOs to help them build their capabilities. Members of Qudurat volunteered to help Balsam investigate the best approaches to achieve financial coverage for palliative care services in Lebanon. Balsam Outreach Coordinator, Loubna Batlouni worked closely with the team that included Jad Bitar and Dr. Mohamad Hamadeh from Qudurat, as well as volunteer supporters of Balsam: Karim Safieddine, Nora Mansour, and Arine Hadidian. The team conducted the project by engaging different stakeholders and proposed the next steps towards attaining insurance coverage for palliative care in the Lebanese context. The findings from this project were very useful in guiding the Balsam team in future advocacy efforts.

Clouds project with Assile Ayyach

Clouds is an initiative founded by documentary filmmaker Assil Ayyash who is interested in adopting an artistic approach towards helping patients with terminal illness. Her activities aim to help patients and families build a legacy while trying to infuse positive experiences in their lives at a challenging time. Balsam collaborated with **Clouds** to produce a documentary on Sarah El Khatib. The film is a tribute to Sarah and her positive spirit as she lived out her experience with cancer. The film was featured at **Music 4 Sara** - a fundraising concert honoring Sara at the Beirut Forum. Balsam's Jinane Abi Ramia was interviewed on **OTV's -Yawm Jdid** along with Ms. Assil Ayyash to discuss the documentary as well as the work of Clouds and Balsam.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLEXdNDA1sU>

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=843381225723637&set=vb.305282619533503&type=2&theater>

Tea Time Yoga – Sponsored by Unihelp and iImpact

UniHelp and **iImpact** clubs at the American University of Beirut jointly organized a **yoga class** for AUB students in November to increase awareness about palliative care and generate funds for Balsam. The class was lead by second year medical student Liane Sadder and attended by approximately 30 people. Many more supported our cause by buying tickets. The revenue generated was donated to Balsam to support our patient care activities.

Community Lectures

As part of Balsam's ongoing efforts to raise awareness about palliative care and end of life planning, Dr. Osman held a discussion on "**End of Life Conversations**" at the monthly meeting of Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (**Bahithat**) on May 27th. The meeting was attended by approximately 20 women researchers from various fields of specialty and the discussion was rich and dynamic. She also gave a two-hour session as part of the **University for Seniors (UFS)** program at the American University of Beirut on June 11th on the same topic. The UFS gives older adults the opportunity to share their wisdom and passion and learn things they have always wanted to learn in a friendly academic environment as well as the chance to interact socially with other seniors, AUB faculty and students. Dr. Osman's lecture was entitled "**Difficult Conversations: Planning for the end of life**" and was attended by 39 members.

Balsam participated in the **4th Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Lebanon) Forum**. We were one of nine NGOs that had the opportunity to introduce their work to the CSR community. The event was attended by many prominent figures including Angelina Elchorst, Ambassador and Head of EU Delegation in Lebanon and Riad Salamé, the Governor of Banque du Liban. Dr. Osman presented Balsam and the concept of palliative care in a session on the Rise and Role of NGOs in corporate social responsibility.

Social and Mass Media

In addition to the television and newspaper coverage associated with the activities above, palliative care and the activities of Balsam were featured on **Al Hurra TV** in April, on **Etejah TV**'s The Direct Act in December and in the online magazine **Al Modon**.

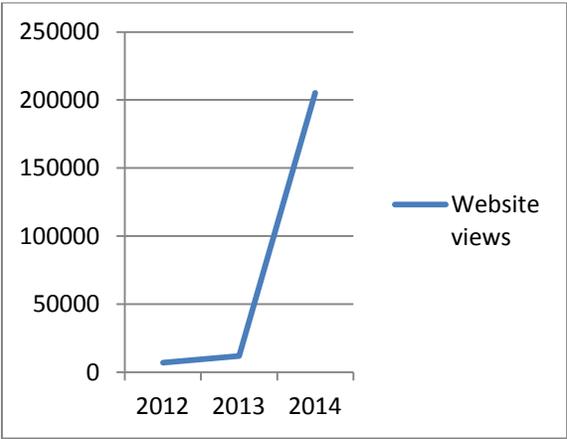
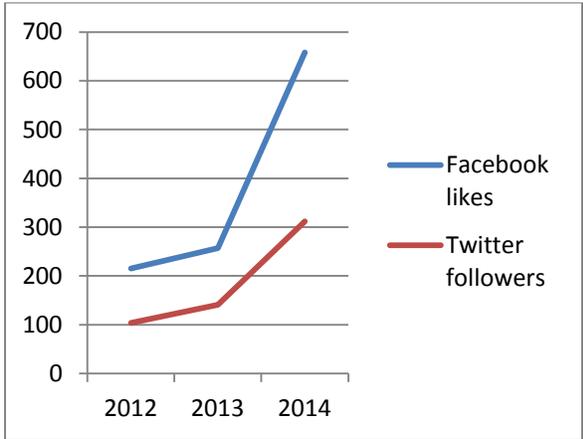
<http://www.almodon.com/society/48ade4f4-27d0-4449-b0bc-5e70ebad981e>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzUs0hPU5mY>

Did you know?

Jinane Abi Ramia launched a social media awareness raising campaign on Balsam's **Facebook** page. The initiative consisted of a series of short informational pieces published on a weekly basis aimed to raise awareness about palliative care in general as well as its current status in Lebanon.

Growing interest in palliative care and Balsam is clearly reflected in the increase in website traffic as well as the increased activity on our Facebook and Twitter accounts (See Table 9).



Figures 4-5: Facebook likes, Twitter followers and the website views

CAPACITY BUILDING

We have been working actively on raising awareness about palliative care among healthcare professionals by providing training to nurses and medical students, and giving lectures at medical conferences in Lebanon and the region.

COURSES

The **Lebanese Medical Students International Committee (LeMSIC)** organized a **Mental Health Summer School** for medical students from June 17th – 27th. Participants included 11 medical students from Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, Palestine, Canada, Tunisia, Kuwait, the USA, and the Netherlands. Dr. Osman, Janane Hanna and Rebecca El Asmar conducted a 2-hour workshop aimed at introducing participants to the concept of palliative care and the psychosocial issues associated with advanced illness. The workshop was interactive and feedback from the students was extremely positive.

Dr. Osman developed a module on palliative care entitled “**Palliative Care in the Whole Patient Course**” as part of the new **Physicians, Patients, and Society 2** course at the **American University of Beirut**. This course is required for second year medical students as part of the new **IMPACT curriculum**. The course ran for the first time this year from September to December. Students were exposed to some of the core concepts of palliative care through interactive and dynamic sessions over 4 weeks. The module was extremely well received by students and evaluated very highly.

Several of the students who took the course developed an interest in palliative care and wanted additional exposure to the field. We invited the students who expressed interest to attend the weekly IDT meetings at Balsam in order to gain a deeper understanding of what palliative care is and how the Balsam team functions. A total of 5 students joined us in our meetings and 2 attended home visits with Balsam nurses.

Dr. Osman contributed to a regional **Training of Trainers in Palliative Care** sponsored by the **World Health Organization EMRO** and the **Gulf Federation of Cancer Control** with the

support of the Kuwait Ministry of Health. The workshop was held in Kuwait City from November 23 – 26 with the participation of 23 trainees. Dr. Osman gave a workshop on **Advocacy in Palliative Care** as well as a lecture on management of GI symptoms. The meeting was also an opportunity to visit the Palliative Care Center in Kuwait and network with others working in palliative care in the region.

STUDENT PROJECTS

A master student in Public Health from the **Faculty of Health Sciences** in AUB completed her practicum and culminating experience at Balsam in the Spring Semester of 2014. Ms. Maryah Damlaj conducted a project entitled “**Situational Analysis of Palliative Care in Lebanon: Focus on Financial Coverage**”. She calculated the average cost per patient admitted to Balsam, reviewed financing models from the literature and proposed recommendations to the Lebanese health care system based on her findings.

LECTURES/CONFERENCES

Members of the Balsam team also worked to increase awareness about palliative care by presenting at a number of conferences in Lebanon and the region. These included:

- **Breast-Gynecological International Cancer Conference Cairo, Egypt** (January 8-9)

Dr. Osman contributed to the palliative care session at the BGICC in Cairo. This was the first year that the conference has a session dedicated to palliative care thanks to the efforts of Dr. Samy AlSirafy in moving palliative care forward in the region. Dr. Osman gave presentations on end of life care and the status of palliative care in Lebanon.

- **AUBMC Breast Cancer Conference** (February 14)

Dr. Osman gave a lecture on pain management and palliative care. Rebecca El Asmar gave a lecture on supportive care for patients with breast cancer.

- **General Surgery Board Review Course – AUBMC** (June 14)

Dr. Osman gave a lecture on palliative care as part of a board review course for surgeons and surgery residents. These lectures to health care professionals are aimed to increase awareness

about palliative care and help emerging physicians consider an alternative to the traditional biomedical approach when they are treating patients with serious illness.

- **9th Best of ASCO** (June 21)

Dr. Osman presented 2 palliative care abstracts at the 9th Best of ASCO meeting at the Habtoor Hotel.

- **11th International Conference for Lebanese Society of Cardiology** (November 6)

Balsam nurses Janane Hanna and Rebecca El-Asmar participated in the 11th International Conference for Lebanese Society of Cardiology by moderating a session and giving a lecture on Palliative Care in Heart Failure. The conference was held at the Hilton Habtour Hotel.

Dr. Osman gave lectures in various departments at AUBMC. These included:

- Grand Round on Palliative care and medical management of intestinal obstruction – **Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology** (April 9)
- Ethics and decision making to General surgery residents (Sept 18) as part of their **SCORE General Surgery Curriculum**
- Session on palliative care to second year resident in the **Department of Family Medicine** (December 4) as part of their **Community Medicine Rotation**. This is the 4th year that she has been giving these sessions in the Department of Family Medicine and they have been highly valued.

INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING

We are committed to providing excellent palliative care that is within the highest quality standards. We therefore continue to seek training opportunities for the whole team to develop our skills and knowledge base. This year members of the team received the following training:

Palliative Care Education and Practice (PCEP) course at Harvard Medical School

Dr. Hibah Osman was offered a scholarship from Harvard Medical School to attend the Palliative Care Education and Practice (PCEP). The course had a major impact on her clinical work and her teaching. It also provided a chance to connect with other palliative care professionals from different settings. (November 2013 and May 2014)

VitalTalk Advanced Communication course

In September 2014, Dr. Michael Khoury attended an advanced communication workshop in Aspen, Colorado designed for professionals working in palliative care. The aim of the workshop was to improve the overall health of patients and their families and the wellbeing of professionals. This was a valuable, hands on, action-oriented, state of the art experience providing the opportunity to work and learn with some of the most prominent clinicians in the field. Utilizing this updated knowledge, skills and approaches, Dr. Khoury designed and delivered several communications skills workshops for and with the Balsam team. Sessions were conducted in both English and colloquial Arabic. Dr. Khoury worked on adapting the workshop to our Lebanese culture.

Dr. Danielle Sara trains Balsam nurses

Dr. Danielle Sara, previously the Medical Director of Weinstein Hospice in Atlanta, Georgia visited Lebanon on 2 separate occasions in 2014. During her visits, she contributed to patient care and as well as the training Balsam nurses. Her years of experience in palliative care and her insight provided valuable contributions to patient care and the team process.

RESEARCH

Dr. Osman is leading a study that aims to map palliative care in Arab countries. The study is being conducted in collaboration with Drs. Arafat Tfaily and Alaa Rihan at AUBMC and Dr. Carlos Centeno of Univesidad De Navarra in Pamplona, Spain. Dr. Centeno has conducted similar studies in Europe and Latin American. The study team is in the process of collecting data. The results are expected to be analyzed and published in 2015. This study is the first of its kind in the region. The results will help inform practitioners, researchers, policy makers and funders as they work towards developing palliative care in the region.

TESTIMONIALS

“Words are not enough to describe my unlimited gratitude to your unit’s unconditional human embrace provided to my precious ‘mami’. Our angel nurse, Hiba, made my mami’s life more bearable in the last four months of her difficult life full of pain and agony. Her regular phone

calls and ... visits ... made her feel well supported. Without her tremendous help ... it was not going to be possible to respect my mami's wish to keep her in her own house.” MD

We would like “to express our deep gratitude and appreciation ...for all your medical attendance and guidance and for your moral and spiritual support during the palliative care of our late mother... We are deeply grateful to Balsam and its GREAT TEAM... May God help you in your noble endeavor.” TC

“We thank you sooo much for the great help, the wonderful spirit and affection that we see with every visit. ...May our Lord bless you all and keep you” MH

If you would like to support Balsam, refer a patient, or get additional information visit our website: www.balsam-lb.org , or contact us on: 01-748574

You can follow us on twitter on *Balsam-LCPC*, like us on Facebook at *Balsam- The Lebanese Center for Palliative Care*, and subscribe to our Youtube channel *BalsamLCPC*

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Acknowledgement

We appreciate Emirates Lebanon Bank S.A.L's continued support of Balsam's mission.



Appendix: Information on admitted patients

Table 3: Comparison of patients admitted 2012 - 2014

Year	2012		2013		2014	
Admitted	55	42 full support	90	46 full support	98	78 full support
		13 partial support*		44 partial support*		20 partial support*
Not Admitted**	11		34		44	
Total	64		124		142	

* Patients who do not need full support or reside outside Greater Beirut

** Patients who do not need palliative care

Table 4: Patient distribution by age

Age groups														
	Range	Avg. Age (yrs)	≤20		20-40		40-60		60-80		80-90		≥90	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2013	4-98	73	1	1	1	1	11	12	44	49	26	29	7	8
2014	11-99	73	1	1	4	4	20	20	37	38	30	31	6	6

Table 5: Patient distribution by diagnosis

Diagnosis	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	#	%								
Cancer	5	100	11	79	47	85	63	70	75	77
Non-cancer*	0	0	3	21	8	15	27	30	23	23

Total	5	100	14	100	55	100	90	100	98	100
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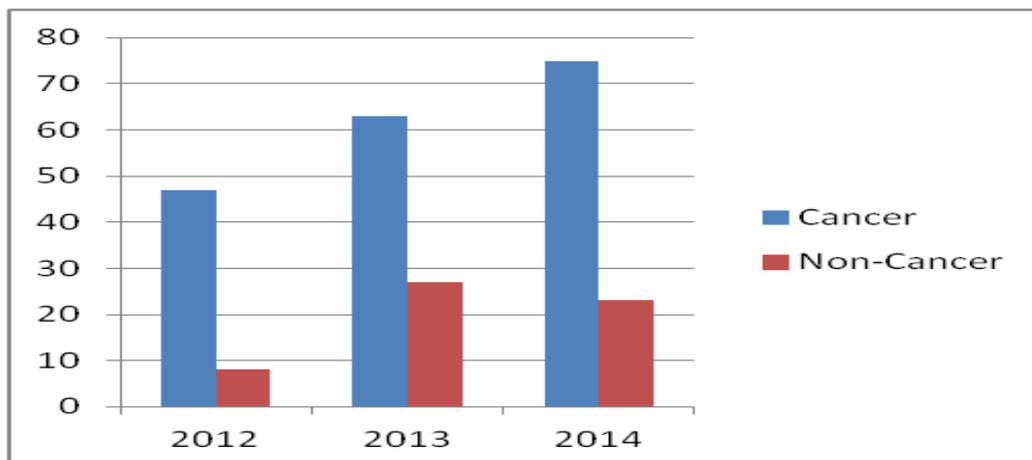


Figure 6: Cancer vs non-cancer diagnosis

Table 6: Patients stratified by disease category (2014)

	Number of patients
Cancer	75
Neurological diseases *	11
Cardiovascular diseases*	10
Pulmonary diseases*	1
Infections*	1

* Non-cancer diagnoses include: Motor Neuron Disease, Dementia, Pulmonary Fibrosis, Heart Failure, Alzheimer, Creutzfeldt -Jacob Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Sepsis

Table 7: Days from referral to intake in 2013-2014

Days	0-2		3-5		6+		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2013	66	73	15	17	9	10	90	100
2014	64	66	26	27	7	7	97	100

Days from referral to admission

*For patient referrals taken from home, the number of days was calculated from the referring call to the first home visit

** For patient referrals from hospitals, the number of days was calculated from the hospital discharge date to the first home visit*

Table 8: Number of patient-days

	2011	2012	2013	2014
# of patient-days	890	2490	3418	11672
Avg patient-days	111	62	62	119

Table 9: Social Media Activity

	2012	2013	2014
Facebook likes	215	472	658
Twitter followers	104	246	312
Website visits	6987	11,863	205,265