



B A L S A M Q U A R T E R L Y

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Support · Care · Guidance

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I N E S S E N C E

The Quality of Mercy

In Memoriam: Balsam interviewed Khaled Hasaballah (RIP) just days before he passed away.
We remember him with affection.



Khaled Hasaballah's first encounter with Balsam was purely by chance. It was a rare stroke of luck for a man who has been largely isolated by the cancer that took a hold of his body more than two years earlier. Khaled's sister works as an AUBMC orderly and happened to be talking to Khaled on the phone when a nurse overheard her and told her about Balsam. Since then, Balsam nurses have been regular visitors to Khaled's Ouzai home.

Lying in his small room, Khaled is now mainly dependent on the kindness of his neighbours and the care and support he receives from Balsam. His sister does what she can but she lives far away, his uncle, for whom he used to work, sometimes helps him financially.

The days are long but Khaled is stoic even when in pain. "I love life," he says. "All I wanted was a regular life." That quest for a regular life was not easy. Khaled's father and mother separated when he was born. At the age of six he returned to his father's house but it was never easy to fit in with his new family. Yet for a man who felt he did not have a childhood, when Khaled looks back on life he says one of the things that pleased him most is the sound of small children laughing.

Another is the work he did in an electrical appliance shop where, until two years ago, he worked hard both as a salesman and a part time electrician. "The hours were long but I liked the work, I miss it."

Khaled longs for life as it used to be, when he was strong and independent. A

quiet, thoughtful man he remembers the dignity of working, paying his bills without help and without the humiliation of being so dependent on others.

But, at the same time, he celebrates the fact that there are people who care for him after a life lived largely as a loner. His neighbours check on him regularly and bring him what he needs in terms of food and water, though these days he can eat very little. His sister gives him a lot of psychological support. Then there is Balsam, which Khaled describes as “ultimate mercy”. Regular visits by Balsam nurses, the painkillers they bring with them and the idea that there is a 24-hour lifeline have all helped to bring hope and relief to Khaled’s tiny world.

In spite of his deep fatigue, Khaled manages a tired smile as he concludes, “People are great.”

M Y B A L S A M

A Friend in Need

Drawing on personal experience, Balsam Board Member Huda Zurayk discusses the impact of palliative care on both the patient and the family.



If you want to pinpoint the moment when the idea of Balsam was initiated, it was probably during a chance encounter on the street between Huda Zurayk, then Dean of AUB’s Faculty of Health Sciences, and Dr. Hibah Osman, now Medical Director of Balsam.

Huda was under terrible pressure trying to make sense of the sudden onset of her mother’s cancer, and of the reluctance of the doctors to find the time and the capacity to discuss her mother’s case with her. Hibah’s solicitous enquiry about the family proved to be a trigger releasing Huda’s suppressed emotions and thus a dialogue took place during which Hibah formulated her first palliative care case.

"I was lost," Huda explains. "Even though I am a scientist and a public health practitioner, I could not get the doctors to talk to me. They were focused on medical treatment and ready to refer to my cousin Nadim, then Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, but not to me. It was simply not their habit and I was both disheartened and upset. When Hibah offered to liaise as a physician between them and me, it was such a relief. For me, that was the beginning of Balsam."

When Balsam was founded officially Huda became a Board Member. Now with an aunt under Balsam's care and the memory of those earlier days still clear in her mind, Huda has firm opinions on the role of palliative care and the part Balsam plays in helping patients and their families. "Despite all my knowledge and connections, I was frustrated. Despite my mother being a highly educated individual, able to discuss with the doctors, it was simply not happening. We were not equipped to deal with our situation. Can you imagine how it is for others?"

With the experience of hindsight, Huda recognizes the advantage of early intervention. "That's the most important thing [palliative care for me, to start early]," she says. "It is no good contacting Balsam just at the end, that is not what palliative care is about. It is about preparing patients for what is to come, helping them to understand their options, getting them the right protocol, at the right time and interceding on their behalf and that of the family. Patients need to know their rights, need to be aware of what's coming and what to do as their illness progresses.

For some of us it is not in our culture to discuss death but this is a reality and it is important to have someone to offer guidance along the way. For example a patient might decide not to be resuscitated if that eventuality arises. It can be a great relief for the family not to have to make that decision."

As a Balsam Board Member Huda is keen to see the pioneering role that Balsam has assumed grow in the public health sector. "The Ministry of Health recognizes palliative care as a specialty. We need to attract more doctors and to train more practitioners outside of Beirut, even if they are not in a position to fully adopt Balsam's approach," she says. "Studies have shown that palliative care can have a significant impact on public health and medical costs. If, for example, we could

include it in health insurance, more medical practitioners could be attracted to the specialty. It really makes a difference in time of great need for both the patient and the family and people are beginning to recognize this. For my family Hibah was a savior, now Balsam helps many more. We need to see it grow and others alongside it."

Huda Zurayk.

R E C E N T L Y



On a mild spring evening, in the glamorous setting of the historic Residence des Pins, generously offered for the occasion by French Ambassador Emmanuel Bonne, Balsam launched its much-anticipated fundraiser Big Band Jazz.

Sipping cocktails while mingling with friends and Balsam supporters, some 550 guests marveled at the imposing architecture ringed by magnificent, decades old trees.

Against this magical backdrop, Balsam founder and Medical Director, Dr. Hibah Osman thanked everyone for coming and promised a lively evening of great music provided by the Big Band Jazz Orchestra of the Lebanese Conservatory, under the leadership of conductor Serghei Bolun. As promised, Dr. Osman kept her welcoming speech short and to the point, before initiating a new, animated Balsam



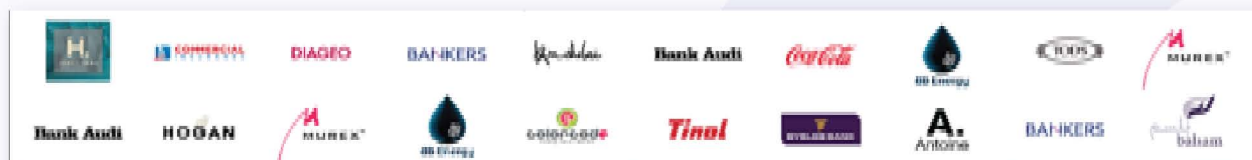
film, explaining what palliative care means to patients and families and Balsam's role in ameliorating the anxiety and pain associated with serious illness.

Dr. Osman reminded those attending that palliative care is still not routinely offered throughout Lebanon and is not included in medical insurance. One of Balsam's goals is to rectify this situation and Dr. Osman explained that progress is being made with insurance companies and the Ministry of Public Health. It is expected that palliative care will become covered by medical insurance in the coming 2-3 years.

Then, as saxophones wailed and trumpets blazed, the audience settled into an enjoyable evening made all the more special knowing that they were here to support a great cause.

In all, 410 tickets had been sold. The funds raised will substantially boost Balsam's ability to help ensure that people live as comfortably as they can while coping with advanced illness. And that families are able to function when confronted with the suffering of their loved ones.

Balsam would like to thank our sponsors and all those who bought tickets and who attended the concert. It would like to thank all contributors to the animation that was prepared for the event including writers, animators, musicians, and the rest of the creative team. It would like to express its appreciation for the support of His Excellency Emmanuel Bonne, the Big Band Orchestra, its sponsors, and all friends of Balsam.



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Thank you

