

Balsam Annual Report 2024



"We cannot change the outcome, but we can affect the journey."

Balsam, the Lebanese Center for Palliative Care, supports patients with serious illnesses and their families to prevent and relieve suffering, and to help patients maintain the best possible quality of life despite their illness. Balsam's interdisciplinary approach includes medical services as well as psychological, social, practical and spiritual support within the family and home environment.



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Message from the President

Dear Supporters and Friends of BALSAM,

As we reflect on the past year, I am honored to share the impact our dedicated team has made in 2024. Despite the many hardships our country has faced, BALSAM remained steadfast in its mission, providing compassionate palliative care to 273 patients. While the majority were Lebanese, our commitment extended to all in need, regardless of nationality. Most of those we served were battling cancer, but our care also reached patients facing other life-limiting illnesses, ensuring they received the dignity, comfort, and support they deserved.

The challenges we encountered were immense. The ongoing war and worsening financial crisis placed extraordinary pressure on our healthcare system, making our work more essential than ever. Yet, in the face of adversity, our team continued to provide unwavering care, often going above and beyond to reach patients in difficult circumstances. Their resilience, selflessness, and deep compassion were a beacon of hope for those in pain, proving that even in the darkest times, humanity and kindness prevail.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our team, whose tireless dedication makes BALSAM's mission possible. I also thank our supporters and partners, who have stood by us and enabled us to continue our work. As we move forward, we remain committed to providing the highest quality of care to those in need, no matter the challenges that lie ahead. Together, we will continue to bring comfort, dignity, and hope to our patients and their families.

With gratitude,

Salah Zeineldine, MD FACP
President of the Board and Executive Director



2024 at a Glance

Number of patients referred

New admissions

Total number of patients supported

297

216

273 (57 carried over from 2023)

Patient Characteristics

Lebanese	95%
Other nationalities	5 %
Age > 65 years	73%
Age 18 - 65 years	21%
Age < 18 years	6%
Female	56%
Male	44%
Cancer diagnosis	74%
Other diagnosis	26 %
Regular support	84%
Distance support	15%
One-time visit	1%

Source of Referrals

Word of mouth	54%
Physicians	23%
AUBMC Palliative Care team	9%
Other Palliative Care Organizations	8%
Social media	2%
Unknown	2%

Patient/Family Satisfaction:

100%

Patient and family satisfaction are measured using standardized questions about symptom management, emotional support, communication and accessibility. Caregivers are contacted by Balsam administration and asked for their feedback on the following:

- Management of the patient's symptoms
- Emotional support provided
- Information sharing
- Shared decision making
- Availability and accessibility of the palliative care team

Caregivers/families are also asked to offer suggestions on how to improve our services



Vision, Mission and Values



Mission

The Lebanese Center for Palliative Care – Balsam aims to relieve suffering and improve the quality of life of patients with serious illness through patient care, advocacy, capacity building and research.

Vision

To integrate palliative care into the Lebanese health system to ensure that it is available and accessible to all who need it.

Values

We believe in:

Providing the best quality of life for as long as life lasts.
Respecting our patients' wishes, values, and beliefs.
Supporting life; not hastening death.

We believe that:

No one should live in pain.
No one should live in fear.
No one should die feeling alone.
Everyone deserves a dignified death.



Programs

We accept self-referrals as well as referrals from local physicians. Once a patient is evaluated and accepted into our care, an individualized care plan is developed by our interdisciplinary team to meet their needs. Balsam care usually includes regular home visits by one of our palliative care nurses, who assesses and manages the patient's symptoms and supports the family. Nurses work under the supervision of our team of physicians. The frequency of nurse visits depends on the needs of the patients and may vary during the course of the illness. We are accessible and available to our patients around the clock.

Our clinical pharmacist and dietician offer support to the nurses and physicians on the team, to provide optimal care. Our social worker provides additional support to patients and families based on their psychosocial needs. If a patient passes away, the Balsam team continues to support the family through the bereavement period, for at least one year. Although our capacity to provide patient visits remains limited to the Greater Beirut area, Balsam has from the outset used telehealth to support patients and physicians outside Beirut. Our experience and research have confirmed the value of this form of support to patients and their families. In 2015, we formalized this service as "Distance Support". Our Distance Support patients and caregivers can reach with their assigned Balsam nurse by telephone around the clock for support and guidance. Patient and families find this form of support a valuable source of medical expertise which provides relief in moments of need.

Acuity and Urgency

Referrals are prioritized according to patient's needs. According to the urgency of their needs, patients are classified as emergent (patients who need to be admitted within 24 hours to Balsam), urgent (patients who need to be admitted within 5 days to Balsam) or routine (patients who need to be admitted within 2 weeks to Balsam). We aim to enroll patients with emergent needs within 24 hours and urgent patients within 5 days of receiving a referral. In 2024, 91% of patients classified as emergent were admitted within 24 hours, and 85% of patients with urgent needs were admitted within 5 days of referral.

Service categories

Regular Support: Regular support patients generally have advanced illnesses that are progressive and expected to require increasing levels of care. They live within the Greater Beirut area and are accessible for routine home visits. Within this program, patients are categorized as "high needs" or "stabilized" according to the medical and psychosocial needs. High-needs patients who have active symptoms requiring management, or significant psychosocial needs, have at least one scheduled nursing visit per week as well as emergency visits when needed. Stabilized patients whose medical or psychosocial needs are minimal require fewer interventions and do not need weekly visits. All patients are reassessed regularly to determine their support needs and frequency of visits.

Distance Support: Patients who live outside the Greater Beirut area are enrolled on our Distance Support Program. The care is tailored to the needs of the family and their accessibility to the Balsam team. Wherever possible, the service may include a one-time home visit by a member of the medical team to set a care plan. Patients are then managed through telecommunication support, by guiding and advising the patient and/or family by phone. At present Balsam is not able to offer emergency medical visits to Distance Support patients.



One-Time Visits

For chronically-ill patients who are medically stable, our intervention might include only one visit. The visit includes patient assessment, management of medications, assessment of equipment needs, and education of the family. It can be an important source of guidance and support for family caregivers. Additional visits may be scheduled, depending on the needs of the patient and the availability of Balsam staff.



Pediatric Palliative Care

The palliative care needs of children and their family members are often quite different from those of adults. Balsam is the only provider of home-based pediatric palliative care in Lebanon. We provide family centered care through our regular support, distance support and one-time visits programs to pediatric patients suffering from life limiting illnesses. We have partnered with the Children Cancer Center of Lebanon (CCCL) to improve the quality of life for children receiving cancer treatment. Through this collaboration, we are able to reduce unnecessary hospital visits and support patients and their families in the comfort of their home.



Bereavement Program

Everyone struggles with loss. At Balsam, we believe that our support of the families of our patients does not end when a patient dies. We continue to support the family for at least one year through our bereavement program.

Achievements

As in many parts of the world, this year offered exceptional challenges in Lebanon. Existing economic and financial challenges were compounded by Israeli attacks impacting our patients, our team, and the whole population. The situation was unpredictable, chaotic and most importantly unsafe. All members of the team were impacted. Some were displaced. Some lost friends and family members. All were anxious and had real and significant safety concerns. Despite that, our work was not interrupted. We are proud to share that work continued and our patients continued to receive the same high quality compassionate care.



Advocacy

After years of advocacy to secure financial coverage for palliative care services, a major milestone achievement was reached in March 2024 when the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) issued the new decree number 1279. This decree acknowledges Palliative and Supportive Care as a subspecialty in clinical medicine and acknowledges the coverage of services offered by Palliative Care teams in hospital inpatient settings. Securing coverage by the NSSF will eventually lead to coverage by private insurance companies.



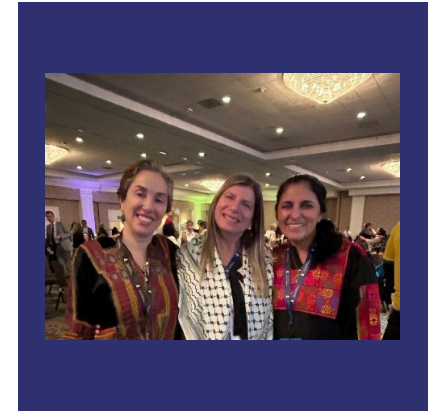
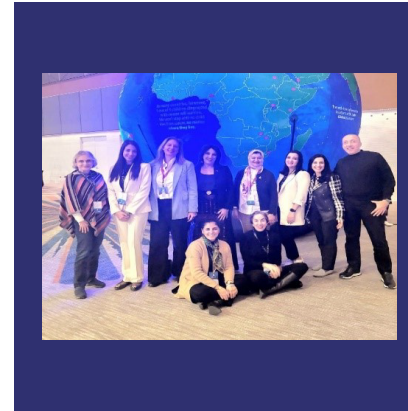
Balsam was welcomed as a new member of the World Patients Alliance (WPA) in March 2024. The mission of WPA is to provide palliative care services to all patients with life limiting illness.

As part of the National Cancer Plan led by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, Balsam and SANAD Hospice Lebanon are working together towards a common goal to advocate to advance palliative care in Lebanon. Balsam and SANAD have a shared commitment to promote palliative care in Lebanon and make it accessible to patients.

Balsam was featured in the October issue of IAHP's Pallinews. The story spotlights the experience of Batoul Haidar and how managed her work with patients in their homes, while juggling her own family's safety and having to relocate from her home to a safer location inside Beirut. In addition, Roula Doughan, our Operations Manager, described how the conflict has affected Balsam's staff, as well as Balsam's daily operations and financial standing, with projections for the near future. Despite the impact of the ongoing conflict in Lebanon on our staff, Balsam continued to offer the same palliative care services to patients in Lebanon.



Balsam founder Dr Hibah Osman and Balsam Operation Manager Roula Doughan attended the St Jude Global Alliance Convening – Global Voices – in Memphis, USA. The convening provided an opportunity to meet more than 300 people from various foundations worldwide; all working to improve access to quality care and increase survival rates for children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases. This initiative falls under Balsam partnership with ALSAC which has been instrumental and vital to the care we provide to our pediatric population.



Janane Hanna was featured on the Global Alliance Platform of St. Jude Global. The article told the story of Balsam and described how we are working to expand palliative care services in Lebanon.

Janane presented alongside Claude Chidiac, in the UK Congress for Palliative Care, the session titled 'Palliative Care Developments in the face of adversity: Lessons learnt from Lebanon'. This session covered palliative care challenges and developments in Lebanon.

Palliative care developments in the face of adversity: Lessons learned from Lebanon

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented tragedy around the world. In Lebanon, this was accompanied by severe political and economic unrest. In addition, the dire health and humanitarian crises were made worse by the devastating explosion in Beirut on August 4, 2020. This was followed by a record high level of healthcare professionals' migration and a war-related influx of more than 1.5 million refugees, in a country that has a population of over 5 million people. This session will explore the key developmental milestones in palliative care in Lebanon, along with current situation analysis in the midst of humanitarian and economic crisis. Focused efforts to mitigate for the magnified impact of inequity in palliative care provision, especially for certain minoritised populations, in the context of economic and humanitarian crisis will be discussed.



Claude Chidiac



Janane Hanna

📅 22 March 2024
 🕒 14:15 - 15:15
 📍 Online
 🌐 www.pccongress.org.uk

Fundraising

Balsam held a 'Giving Day' in November. All contributions from this event went to support our mission to provide our patients and their loved ones with hope for less difficult days, less suffering, and better quality of life. This day serves as a reminder of the importance of supporting palliative care, and provides an opportunity for people to give and to support organizations that focus on improving the quality of life for patients as well as their families.



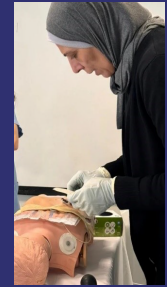
Balsam's Giving Day
December 2

Give Hope, Give Comfort, Give Today!
Together, we can make every moment count for our patients and their families.

Donate Now !

Capacity Building

Janane Hanna has been a regular contributor to the fellowship course delivered by St Christopher's Hospice, London, in partnership with the Institute of Palliative Medicine in Kerala, India. This year she gave a session on "Establishing Palliative Care Services: Lessons from Successes and Failures". Dr. Hibah Osman also gave a session "Contextualizing Palliative Care" in the same course.



At Balsam, we aim to ensure our nurses are trained, skilled and up to date. Balsam nurses underwent a training activity in the simulation lab at the Hariri School of Nursing at AUB. During this training activity, our nurses used simulation mannequins to maintain their clinical skills.



Dr. Rana Yamout attended a Pediatric Palliative Care EPEC train-the-trainer course at UCSF. As a result, she is now certified to provide pediatric palliative care training for healthcare professionals. This is much needed in the field, as pediatric palliative care patients have needs that are very specific to them, as well as to those caring for them. Dr. Joe El Khoury was an active educator on the EPEC Pediatrics team; he taught at two seminars in Prague, initiated by a philanthropic foundation with an exceptional vision, the Nadace rodiny Vlčkových. The first seminar focused on teaching pediatric palliative care, while the second aimed at training trainers in this essential field.





Dr. Joe Khoury presented at the 6th Pediatric Palliative Care conference in Rome. He was able to reflect on Navigating Culture and Religion in Palliative Care; addressing cultural and spiritual dimensions in healthcare. This presentation was a reminder that medicine isn't just about addressing physical symptoms, but about being human. It's about recognizing each family's unique story and beliefs, and finding ways to bridge cultural differences with empathy and respect.

Dr. Khoury also co-lead a transformative palliative care workshop in Dakar with 40 participants from diverse professional backgrounds. Through three days of interactive learning—punctuated by rich discussions, meaningful exchanges, and hands-on practice—core aspects of palliative care were explored, from managing pain to navigating complex conversations with empathy and compassion

Dr. Khoury joined the First Regional Interdisciplinary Pediatric Palliative Care Workshop organized by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and The Pediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group. This workshop brought together an incredible community of healthcare professionals from across the region to strengthen palliative care for children with cancer. Dr Khoury presented about communication skills in pediatric, as well as about Balsam serving as a model for providing pediatric palliative care in the EMRO region.

Dr Rana Yamout and Janane Hanna were on the scientific committee planning for this workshop with St Jude, however, were not able to join in person due to the war in Lebanon.

Chadia Fayad presented the session titled 'Introduction to Palliative Care and Balsam' to Balamand 3rd year nursing students.

Batoul Haidar attended the Palliative Care in Neurology and Neuro multidisciplinary seminar in Salzburg Austria. This seminar was an opportunity for Batoul to get acquainted with the medical, psychiatric, psychosocial and spiritual needs of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. The Palliative Care Nursing Association organized the European Certificate of Essential Palliative Care course - Lebanese version under the Order of Nursing in Lebanon. Members of the Balsam team were involved in the organization, planning and delivery of sessions. Hiba Maki, Janane Hanna, Rana Yamout, and Rebecca el-Asmar all gave sessions about various topics pertinent to Palliative care in this basic palliative care training course which was given to nurses in the greater Beirut area.

Our collaboration with American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC) provided numerous opportunities for capacity building.



Roula attended the ALSAC Financial Efficiency Webinar which provided valuable insights and strategies to enhance financial operations of the organization. She also attended “Introduction to effective digital fundraising” – a course which provides a comprehensive overview of digital strategies to expand the foundations fundraising abilities. Roula also took part of the Strategic planning course offered by the Executive Education Program at the Oneill School of Public and Environmental Affairs in partnership with ALSAC. This course explored key aspects of building and sustaining a high-performance organization through strategic planning.

Roula Doughan and Maya Alam joined the interactive ‘ALSAC Developing a Fundraising Plan Coaching’ course which aimed to increase their knowledge and skills related to fundraising. Roula and Maya participated in ALSAC SME-led coaching sessions which spanned several weeks to develop a fundraising calendar and plan.

Dr Hibah Osman and Roula participated in the virtual course “Purposeful boards, Powerful Fundraising” between September and October 2024. This course focused on the role the board plays in fundraising and how to best structure the organization to support this role.

Medical student and Balsam volunteer Christelle Zeidan participated in a 3-week course “Developing a Communications Plan” which offered training in selecting the most appropriate communication channels to effectively reach and engage stakeholders. Christelle is part of the team that manages Balsam’s social media outlets.

Research

Balsam physician Dr. Joe El Khoury, who was selected as a member of the scientific council of the French palliative care society, presented a pilot study on the subcutaneous administration of acetaminophen at a palliative care conference in Palermo, Italy. The conference covered three days of meetings, networking, sharing and above all updating and learning the latest developments in palliative care. Dr. Khoury also published his article “Palliative care in Lebanon; a slow growth, but an unflinching resilience”.



The Story of Sabah

At the age of 75, Mrs. Sabah Ezzo had lived a rich life filled with beautiful memories—memories of a wonderful marriage, children and countless family gatherings. When she was diagnosed with lung cancer, she was shocked. Her diagnosis weighed heavily. Her disease was progressing, and she was experiencing significant symptoms. Her pain was constant. Shortness of breath made even the simplest tasks feel like a huge effort. Every day seemed like a struggle. Sabah was consumed with one constant aching worry. Sabah's granddaughter's wedding was just around the corner, and she couldn't bear the thought of not being there. Sabah wanted nothing more than to be a part of the celebration. Unfortunately, her pain and fatigue were getting worse, and the possibility that she would be well enough to attend the wedding was feeling increasingly unlikely.

This all changed when Sabah was introduced to Balsam on January 22, 2024. Balsam approached Sabah's care from a different angle. The focus shifted from managing the cancer to a more holistic approach. Based on Sabah's expressed goals and priorities, we concentrated on managing her symptoms. Sabah's priority was to feel well enough to attend and enjoy the wedding, and that became the priority of her Balsam team. The team included doctors, nurses and a social worker. They worked to ensure that she felt comfortable and supported, not only physically, but emotionally and psychologically as well. Sabah's nurse, Alia, worked to manage Sabah's medications. Together, they were able to find a balance that helped relieve her pain without making her feel exhausted. The relief was immediate. Sabah could breathe a little easier, and for the first time in weeks, she felt like she had control over her body again.

It wasn't just the physical care that mattered—it was the emotional support. The palliative care team understood that Sabah's quality of life was just as important as her survival, and they provided Sabah and her family with the tools and guidance to help her stay positive and hopeful. Sabah's family was an unwavering pillar of strength offering love, encouragement and constant support day after day. As the wedding day approached, the family's involvement became even more pronounced. They coordinated with Balsam's team to ensure that Sabah would have the necessary support to manage her symptoms.

On February 28, the day of the wedding had arrived. Sabah's pain was controlled. She was no longer short of breath, but walking remained a challenge. A wheelchair and a portable oxygen tank were secured, transportation was arranged and Sabah was assisted in dressing and preparing for the wedding. She was able to attend and enjoy the wedding. Sabah and her family were able to create more beautiful memories at a milestone event that would stay with them for years. This would not have been possible without the incredible care she received from both her family and the Balsam team.

In the weeks that followed, as expected, Sabah's health continued to decline. She passed away on March 15. In her final days, the memory of her granddaughter's wedding stayed with her and continued to give her joy. With the support of Balsam, Sabah was able to experience her last months in the most meaningful way possible, with dignity and joy. She didn't simply survive her final days; she was able to thrive in them.

Despite the loss, her family was grateful to be able to care for her at home, and that her final days were rich and meaningful.



Gratitude

President and the Board Members

As we reflect on the progress and achievements of the past year, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed Board Members and President. Their leadership, dedication and vision have been instrumental in guiding us toward our mission. We appreciate the time, expertise and commitment they consistently invest in Balsam.



Team

As we reflect on this year's accomplishments, it is important for us to acknowledge the unwavering dedication of our incredible team. Every individual has played a vital role in our success, and together, we have overcome challenges.

To our Medical Director...thank you Dr. Rana Yamout for your exceptional leadership. Your guidance has been crucial for Balsam's success and growth.

To our Operation Manager...thank you Roula Doughan for ensuring that everything always runs smoothly at Balsam. Your strategic vision has allowed us to reach new heights.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our team of nurses, whose exceptional care, compassion, and commitment to our patients have been the foundation of our success. Your tireless effort has been truly remarkable. Thank you Alia Tabsh, Chadia Fayad, Janane Hanna, Rebecca El Asmar, Batoul Haidar and Abeer Fleifel for everything you do.

Thank you to our wonderful physicians Dr Karim Farah and Dr Aline Zakhem for providing support and guidance to our nurses and your role in supporting our patients. We are grateful for your expertise, passion and commitment. Thank you Dr. Khoury for advocating for Balsam world wide.

To our social worker, Hiba Makke, your ability to listen, empathize and guide patients through difficult times has made a huge difference in improving patient outcomes and experiences. Thank you for helping our patients and families during their toughest moments.

To our quality controller, Maya Alam, thank you for ensuring that our processes meet the high-quality standards we strive for.

To our patients and families who allow us into their homes and entrust us with what matters most to them...their lives. We are honored and grateful for your trust.





Donors

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to our generous donors. Your donations have touched countless lives, and your support has been critical to the success of our mission and make a meaningful impact in the communities we serve. Thank you once again for your generosity and your support.

Supporters

Thank you to all our supporters for your invaluable contribution to our work. Whether you have donated your time, resources, expertise or energy, your involvement makes an important difference. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to our mission.

At Balsam, we are committed to provide the best quality care. We aim to support and guide at every step of the way. Together, we will overcome the challenges.

Donations

We are committed to providing the best quality palliative care to our patients regardless of their ability to pay. The generosity and support of our donors makes this possible. Our donations, no matter how small have sustained us and inspired us to continue this important work.

Bank

Beneficiary Bank: Banque BEMO SAL
Beirut – Lebanon
SWIFT: EUMOLBBE
Account Number: 8900291176
IBAN: LB78 0093 0000 0035 0092 43661
Currency Code : USD

Beneficiary Bank: Banque AUDI SAL
Beirut, Lebanon Bliss Branch
SWIFT: AUDBLBBX
Account Number: 000805100008
IBAN: LB58 0056 0000 0000 0008 0510 0008
Currency Code : USD

Online

Support online by following the below link:
<https://fundahope.com/fundraisers/palliative-care-despite-difficulties>



Thank You

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