

## **The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Beirut Breast Cancer Conference: Supporting Emergency Department Covid-19 Frontliners**

Despite Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis in Lebanon, the Division of Hematology and Oncology, and the Breast Cancer Center of Excellence at Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, organized the ninth annual Beirut Breast Cancer Conference BBCC-9, in collaboration with the Lebanese Society of Medical Oncology and the Arab Medical Association Against Cancer, with expert international physicians and researchers from the United States, Europe, Arab countries, and Lebanon. The conference was held with a special participation from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of New York and King Hussein Cancer Center in Amman.

Lecturers and participants presented and discussed the major new advances in accurate diagnosis, conservative surgery of the breast and axillary lymph nodes, radiation therapy, new chemotherapy, targeted, hormonal, and immune therapies. Participants also discussed the new recommendations that women treated for early breast cancer in complete remission, may be allowed after 3 years to hold preventive medications, get pregnant if they wish so, and go back on their medicines after delivery.

Participants also emphasized the importance of treating patients with cancer during COVID-19 pandemic, all that while taking all the recommended precautions to reduce potential transmission of coronavirus to patients and healthcare workers, in addition to utilization of online technology and Telemedicine.

Conference included multiple educational sessions, multidisciplinary tumor boards sessions where physicians discussed actual cases of their patients and make treatment recommendations, in addition to special research sessions by doctors in training.

The conference also included full sessions for nurses, pharmacists and non-governmental organizations NGOs with a workshop organized by the Lebanese Breast Cancer Foundation to support patients and survivors.

On the final day of the meeting at a closing ceremony, BBCC-9 president, Professor Nagi El Saghir, Head of the Division of Hematology and Oncology and Director of the Breast Center of Excellence at NKBCI at AUBMC said, "It is with great satisfaction and pride that we close the ninth Beirut breast cancer conference where we reviewed all the new advances in breast cancer research and management that allow us now to cure more than 80 to 90% of early breast cancer cases and improve survival of patients with metastatic breast cancer for years in cases of spread."

Dr. El Saghir also said new advances are targeted against cancer cell protein products and cancer cells DNA mutations. Those new treatments have now all become available in Lebanon and that there is fear many of them are going to become difficult to obtain because of the higher expenses and the economic collapse in the country. There is a real risk that the percentage of patients whom we can cure for from cancer will decrease and that would be a very unfortunate step backward. He also requested that insurance bodies issue speedy approvals for patients who are being forced to pay out-of-pocket expenses for their medications. He said that many medications are now missing from pharmacy shelves and interruption of treatment can cause the cancers to return.

He pointed out to the important new recommendations from international cancer organizations who believe in the importance of offering the coronavirus vaccine to cancer patients, with the exception of those who have severe immunodeficiency in addition to patients on the bone marrow transplantation for blood cancers who should consult with their physicians first.

El Saghir added, "Out of great respect and appreciation for the efforts of our colleagues physicians and nurses in the front liners against COVID-19, we have decided that proceeds of this conference will go to support them at the Emergency Departments at the American University of Beirut Medical Center and Saint Georges University Hospital in Beirut, because if it weren't for their daily sacrifices and efforts we wouldn't have been able to hold our conferences and take care of our patients."

Director of NKBCI, Dr. Ali Taher, emphasized the importance of this conference and the efforts that AUBMC is exerting to continue to take care of cancer patients throughout COVID-19 pandemic.

The President of the Lebanese Society of Medical Oncology, Dr. Nizar Bitar, sent a message of support and appreciation for the efforts and Continuing Medical Education that BBCC-9 offers for physicians in Lebanon and Worldwide.

In his turn, Dr. Sami Khatib, president of the Arab Medical Association against Cancer, praised the great efforts of organizing this conference and the Arab participation online virtually to improve diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients.

The president of the Order of Nurses of Lebanon, Dr. Myrna Doumit, stressed on the role of nurses in taking care of cancer patients during the coronavirus pandemic and the need to support them.

The Lebanese Order of Physicians in Tripoli, Dr Salim Abi Saleh, emphasized the combined efforts of doctors all over Lebanon to take care of cancer patients and education during Covid19 pandemic.

The President of the Lebanese Order of Physicians in Beirut, Dr. Charaf Abou Charaf, praised the great scientific efforts of BBCC9 organizers to continue to educate, research, and improve the care of cancer patients despite of Covid-19 pandemic and financial crisis in Lebanon.

Chairperson of the Emergency Department at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, Dr. Evelyn Hitti, thanked Dr. Nagi El-Saghir and the organizers of the meeting for their continued support and for allocating the proceeds of this meeting to support the needs of the doctors and nurses in the emergency departments at AUBMC and St. George University Hospital in Beirut. She stressed their determination to continue caring for patients with Covid-19 with full protection procedures of the healthcare workers.

Dr. El Saghir thanked all the speakers and participants as well as the AUBMC Continuing Medical Education CME Office for making BBCC-9 a great success and announced that pdf and videotapes of lectures will be made available on BBCC website [www.beirutbcc.org](http://www.beirutbcc.org), and <https://www.aub.edu.lb/fm/CME/>. ended The closing ceremony was concluded with a musical online performance by Aziza. The conference was broadcasted from the Assembly Hall of the American University of Beirut, which was transmitted live for the conference participants in the United States, Europe, Arab countries and Lebanon.