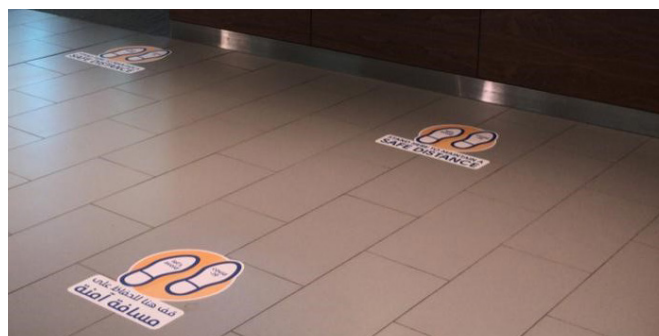


## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR: NKBCI COVID-19 COPING PLAN

The worldwide COVID-19 outbreak suspended many of our daily functions in life. While the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute remained operational at all times, certain coping plan mechanisms had to be implemented. We, therefore, wanted to provide a brief summary about how our clinical and research operations were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how we coped with the forthcoming changes.

When it comes to cancer treatment, we remain committed to providing the highest level of care and compassion to our all cancer patients. However, studies showed that the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is by limiting and minimizing our exposure to other individuals. To that end, several clinical interventions were adopted during this pandemic:

- **Appointment booking:** All patients are screened before booking their appointments to ensure they have no travel history and no encounter with a CORONAVIRUS infected patient.
- **Deferrals were done for patients who had a positive answer**
- **Reduction of clinic slots for Hematologist Oncologist:** This was applied after the decrease in patient volume. It allowed clinic assistants and tellers a more flexible schedule for alterations.
- **WEBEX meetings:** All Multidisciplinary Tumor Boards were done through WEBEX to respect physical distancing.
- **Handling NSSF:** In the infusion, NSSF issue was resolved in terms of availing "MOUAFKA MOUAKHARA" for patients on the spot as well as availing the needed medical report to justify the admission of the patients. Communication was done with the patient access department to get it through an online solution that NSSF has provided.
- **Elevators:** A visitor elevator was fully dedicated to the oncology patients in Daniel ACC.
- **Physical distancing:** Footsteps' marks were placed at the check in and check out desks of both clinics and infusion.



As we all know, cancer is difficult enough during normal times, and the added anxiety and stress caused by COVID-19 was a real challenge to all of us. Accordingly, the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute was able to:

- Establish the Online Consultation for Hematology Oncology
- Give remote access to all physicians to allow WEBEX meetings

While prioritizing patient safety, we also acknowledged the increased risk for our on-site healthcare workers, faculty, and staff and cared for their safety as well. The following changes were implemented:

- **Alternation plan of all admin staff** to facilitate working from home was put in place and shared with the Department of Human Resources as per AUBMC regulations.
- **Drug reps' visits were channeled through telephones rather than live visits.**
- **Holidays and vacation days covered some of the paid leave days.**

NKBCI's cancer research operations also witnessed changes in recent weeks. While research has not stopped, it has slowed down to better protect our staff. Rather than having our staff report to work daily, researchers were physically available to perform only those procedures that cannot be done remotely.

As always, we are incredibly grateful and committed to our patients, survivors, families, friends .... For this reason, we were able to reach them through social media platforms to provide them with prevention messages during this pandemic.

## TELEMEDICINE TAKES THE LEAD IN CANCER CARE STRATEGY DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

"When I first joined AUB, I had a strong conviction that I can make a difference," said Executive Vice President and In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, TeleHealth has come forward as a necessary step to connect patients with their healthcare providers. This tool offered by AUBMC created a remote link between patients and their healthcare providers through a secure internet connection.

The Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute, and as part of its commitment to the welfare of its patients, was one of the units that strongly engaged in TeleHealth to provide patients better access to care while helping them stay at home for prolonged periods.

### HEALTHCARE JUST GOT CLOSER.

RECEIVE BLOOD AND CANCER CARE FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME THROUGH SCHEDULING YOUR ONLINE VIDEO VISIT TODAY.



You can now schedule your online video visit with your oncology/hematology physician through MyChart. For more information, please call 01- 759 618, or visit [www.myaubhealth.aubmc.org](http://www.myaubhealth.aubmc.org)

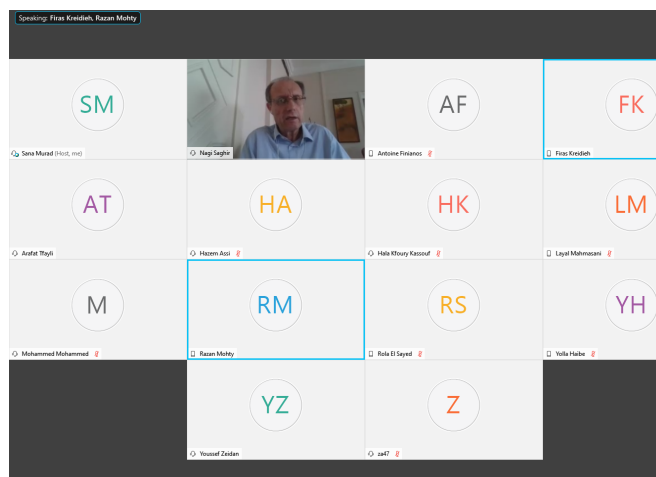


## VIRTUAL TUMOR BOARDS – CANCER DOES NOT STOP FOR COVID-19

Patients with cancer are often discussed in a multidisciplinary tumor board. These are complex discussions, involving multiple specialties such as surgery, radiation oncology, medical oncology, pathology, radiology, genetics, and nurse navigators who all meet, mostly in-person, to come up with a tailored plan specific to that patient's cancer type.

In light of COVID-19, in-person meetings have been reduced or prohibited to decrease the health risk for treating staff. However, now more than ever, multidisciplinary discussions are critical for cancer treatment decision making in this pandemic. Thus, meeting virtually went from an option to a requirement.

Fortunately, the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute was an early adopter of a cancer-specific, tumor board platform.





# WORLD CANCER DAY: AUBMC TO COMBINE ARTS AND MEDICINE IN TREATING CANCER PATIENTS

On the occasion of World Cancer Day, the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute (NKBCI) of the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) and the Cancer Support Fund (CSF) held an awareness day under the international theme of "I Am and I Will". The event aimed to make the whole community recognize and advocate the role of imagination and creativity in developing and maintaining health for all patients, especially cancer patients. It also pledged the strong commitment of both NKBCI and CSF to continually assist and support cancer patients especially through creative engagement and expression that would lead to better health and well-being.

The event hosted by News Anchor, Rola Safa, took place at the Halim and Aida Daniel Academic and Clinical Center (Daniel ACC) lobby. Attendees included cancer patients and their families, local and international physicians, health professionals from different backgrounds including medicine, nursing, public health, and members of prominent NGOs from TIES, AMALOUNA, Cancer Support Fund, Balsam, Palliative and Supportive Care Program, Lebanese Breast Cancer Foundation, Revive Association, The Health and Wellness Center and Smoking cessation program, and Children Cancer Center of Lebanon.

Dr. Ali Taher, NKBCI Director said: "One of my initiatives is to enhance our hospital environment and patient experience through exhibitions and performances. While arts and science may sometimes be viewed at two opposite ends of a spectrum, we at NKBCI are trying to converge these fields."

Dr. Fadlo Khuri, AUB President, said: "For the patients, this is an intimate, personal, and frightening voyage. People undergo this voyage every day, and it's difficult that this voyage is at a time of uncertainty in this country. But, I will say that in this country there's tremendous quality in-depth at this university and elsewhere in cancer care and in compassion. Michael Douglas said 'cancer did not bring me to my knees, it brought me to my feet', and on this World Cancer Day, it's important that each and every one of us participates in a society and in a family that helps bring cancer patients to their feet." *(Continue on page 4)*





Former director of AUB Medical Center, Dr. Ziyad Ghazzal, said: "Our role as healthcare professionals is instrumental, crucial, and should be combined with key stakeholders in all public and private sectors as this is a global responsibility across our communities. The more we understand the causes of cancer the more we realize that we need to get ahead of this disease and take action to impact the future."

Hala Dahdah Abou Jaber, President and Founder of the Cancer Support Fund, said: "I will never let down the people I committed to help. I will not surrender, and I will not let despair get to any of our patients."

Dr. Rihab Nasr, Director of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program, said: "This event is not a celebration of cancer, but a celebration of the day we were all united against cancer."

The event was organized with Durham University (DU), the Lebanese American University (LAU), and Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music (LNHCM), several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in this field who adopted the "I Am and I Will" campaign of the International Union for Cancer Control (UICC) on the 4th of February, 2020. It held an overview of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program (CPCP) and the achievements they have accomplished in the past two years, and a series of trivia questions to the public that helped in increasing the community knowledge in relation to cancer occurrences. The trivia questions were followed by Video Installation in the Daniel ACC lobby, created and directed by Dr. Lina Abiad and Ms. Dima Al Ansari. A Musical Show performed by the President of the National Conservatory, Mr. Bassam Saba and the Tenor Ms. Ghada Ghanem followed.

The event was featured on the Union International for Cancer Control (UICC) Facebook live stream and was on the international platform of UICC. This cancer awareness day is one of many outreach activities organized by the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute (NKBCI) of the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC).



## THE BREAST CANCER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT AUBMC HOLDS ITS 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BEIRUT BREAST CANCER CONFERENCE

The Breast Cancer Center of Excellence at the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute (NKBCI) at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) organized their 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Beirut Breast Cancer Conference (BBCC8) on February 13-15, 2020. The conference brought together various Lebanese and Arab medical associations, non-governmental organizations, and Lebanese and international experts in the fight against breast cancer and welcomed 295 attendees and lecturers from Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, France, Belgium, Spain, and the United States.



BBCC8 is a distinctive annual event that focuses on updates on the different treatment modalities adopted in the new era of treatment of patients with breast cancer. It aims at bridging gaps in knowledge as well as becoming a platform for a multidisciplinary approach to management and new research in Lebanon and the Middle East.

The opening ceremony hosted by news anchor, Rola Mouawad, was attended by a unique and international mix of experts, medical, surgical and radiation oncologists, healthcare professionals, scientific researchers, funders and decision makers to exchange their knowledge, experience, and research innovations in the diagnosis and treatment for breast cancer.

Dr. El Saghir, Director of the Breast Center of Excellence at AUBMC and Conference Chair, said: "We are keen to fight medical corruption as well as the neglect in medical practice by holding scientific conferences and devise international recommendations that best serve the patient outcome and reduce disease complications; doing so reduces the financial burden on patients, 3<sup>rd</sup> party insurance payers, government and society."

Dr. Mohamad Haider representing the Minister of Public health Dr. Hamad Ali Hassan said that the Ministry of Public Health is shouldering most of the costs on uninsured patients in Lebanon by providing coverage of chemotherapy drugs and hospitalizations and therefore needs more budget allocations from the government. The panel agreed that this conference gives the participants opportunities to update their knowledge and implement new recommendations for treatment of breast cancer and its subtypes, discuss the importance of supportive palliative care for curable patients, as well as end of life counseling where appropriate.





## THE CANCER SUPPORT FUND AT AUBMC FIGHTS CANCER WITH MUSIC

The Cancer Support Fund (CSF) at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) in collaboration with Al Bustan Music Festival held a walk-in concert Entitled "Beethoven - Where Hope Grows". The concert was led by the internationally renowned pianist Gloria Campaner who serenaded cancer patients and guests with the "Moonlight" Sonata.

This time, the fund chose to bring forward a new kind of support that depends on healing through music. "I strongly believe that active music engagement will allow all patients, especially cancer patients, to reconnect with the healthy parts of themselves, even in the face of their debilitating condition," said Dr. Ali Taher, Director of Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute and Co-founder of the Cancer Support Fund.

"We are fighting cancer with music, we are beating sickness with art, today our medical combat doesn't come with hospital instruments, today our battle is melodic," added Ms. Hala Dahdah Abou Jaber, President and Founder of the Cancer Support Fund.

The event was organized in collaboration with Al Bustan Music Festival, to alleviate cancer patients' suffering and divert their mind from the illness. "AUBMC is the place where hope grows. When we face a problem, hope is renewed. We salute cancer patients and their courage and wish them all the best," said Ms. Laura El Khazen Lahoud, Vice President of Al Bustan Music Festival.

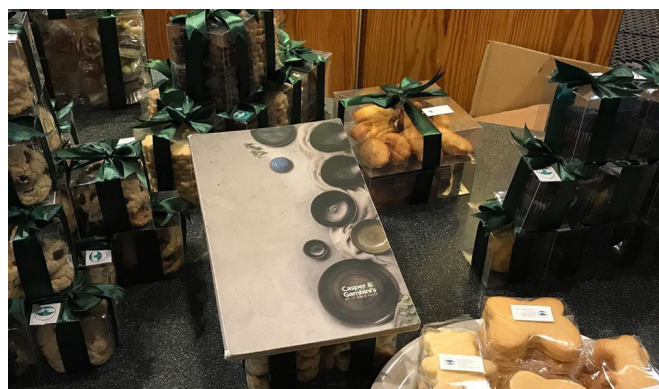
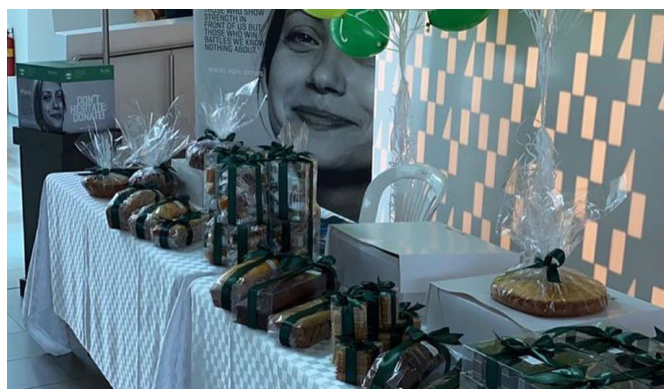
The event took place at AUBMC, Halim and Aida Daniel Academic and Clinical Building Lobby where the baby grand Yamaha piano, generously offered by Mr. Salim Abou Samra, found its new home. The piano was painted by Billy, The Artist, who donates his time to paint pianos in collaboration with the New York based NGO Sing for Hope whose mission is to spread music and art to those who need it the most in healthcare facilities and schools.



## CSF BAKE SALE

Through local coffee shop sales and a special stand at the Daniel ACC Lobby (AUBMC), the CSF team organized a bake sale on February 6, 2020 to shed light and inspire individuals and communities to help fight cancer.

This first CSF bake sale was held on the occasion of World Cancer Day, when a group of volunteering women decided to have an enormous homemade bake sale to raise money and help fund the treatment of cancer patients.



## DR. ALI TAHER: BREAKTHROUGH CLINICAL TRIAL WITH GLOBAL HEALTH IMPACT

Results from a clinical trial by AUB Professor of Medicine, Hematology, and Oncology, Dr. Ali Taher and a multicenter international team has recently been published in the New England Journal of Medicine. The publication reports the benefits of Luspatercept for patients with transfusion-dependent  $\beta$ -thalassemia (TDT), which subsequently led to the FDA approval of this breakthrough treatment.



The trial evaluated the ability of Luspatercept—a recombinant fusion protein that binds transforming growth factor  $\beta$  superfamily ligands—in reducing transfusion requirement in TDT patients. The aim behind the trial was to improve the quality of life and mitigate the risks of chronic transfusion therapy, including secondary iron overload and associated morbidity and mortality. In the larger picture, this would also address the ongoing global challenge of providing blood products, especially in resource-poor countries.

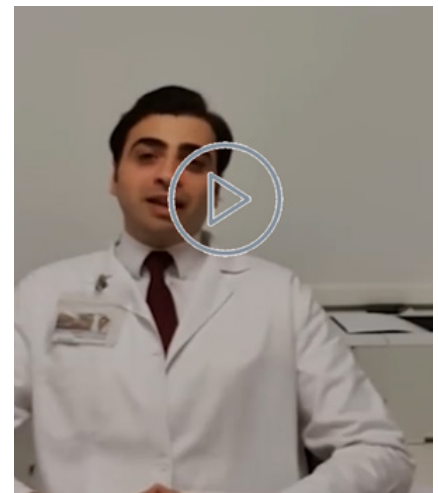
The study included 336 patients assigned in a 2:1 ratio into Luspatercept or placebo groups over approximately 64 weeks. The trial met its primary endpoint showing that Luspatercept is superior to placebo in reduction of transfusion requirement, with a proportion of patients becoming transfusion-independent.

Dr. Taher, one of the main authors and highest recruiting investigators in the trial, has spent decades of research trying to improve outcomes in this patient population by optimizing standards of care through leadership of international management guidelines as well as large-scale multicenter trials investigating novel therapies that address the underlying pathophysiology. Several of his trials led to drug approvals that transformed the patient journey and the way we understand the disease today.

## SALIM EL-HOSS BIOETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM PROGRAM: CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

The Salim El-Hoss Bioethics and Professionalism Program at the American University of Beirut- Faculty of Medicine and Medical Center (AUB FM-MC) Celebrated its 10th years of unwavering commitment to Bioethics, Medical Humanism, and Patient-Centered Care in Lebanon and the Region. The program featured doctors, patients, and lawyers from around the globe to talk about the importance of bioethics in medicine perspective and the impact of the program worldwide.

Dr. Jean El Cheikh, Dr. Rana Yamout and Dr. Firas Kreidieh from the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute participated by providing live testimonies talking about their commitment to bioethics with patients. These videos were published on social media during the month of April 2020.





## NKBCI AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY LAUNCH THE PSYCHO-ONCOLOGY PROGRAM

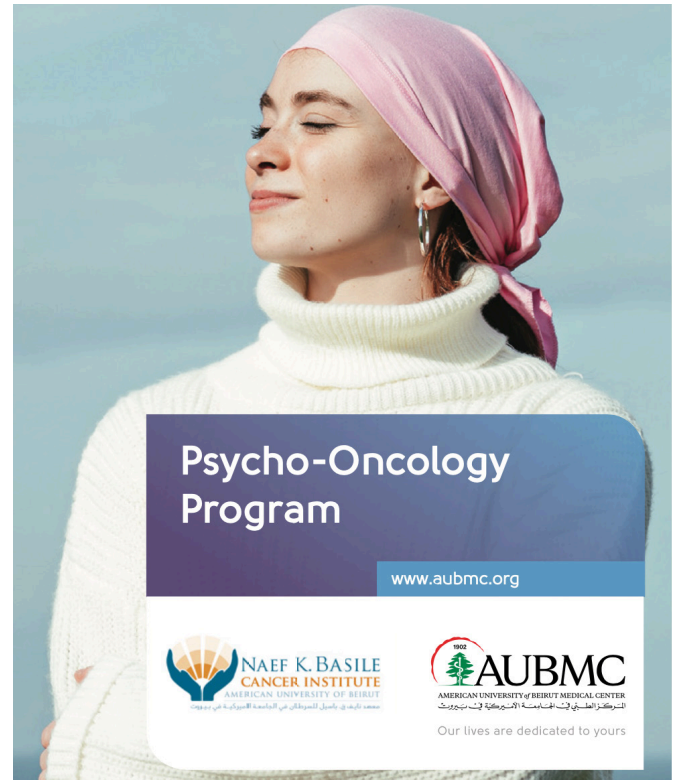
The Department of Psychiatry and the Naef K. Basile Cancer Institute have jointly announced the initiation of the Psycho-Oncology program. This program aims to provide an integrated multidisciplinary standardized care to cancer patients and their families all throughout their cancer journey, from diagnosis into survivorship.

In line with the Union for International Cancer Control and the International Psycho-Oncology Society guidelines, all cancer patients at AUBMC will be universally screened for psychosocial distress and assessed accordingly.

The program offers a range of timely and convenient services including individual psychiatry medication management, evidence-based individual psychotherapy, and group psychotherapy.

The Psycho- Oncology team includes, Dr. Maya Bizri, director of the program, Mrs. Hiba Salem, clinical psychologist, and a team of psychiatric nurses.

This multidisciplinary program is meant to help meet the unique psychological and psychiatric needs of cancer patients and promote their overall emotional wellbeing during their illness journey.







## DR. ROLA AL SAYED

**Q: When did you join the Naef K. Basil Cancer Institute?**

A: June 2017

**Q: What is your job title?**

A: Hematology-oncology clinical fellow

**Q: What are your main responsibilities?**

A: Our responsibilities as fellows are basically divided to multiple different parts:

- Educational, educational first as this is the basis for, hopefully, a long life of tending to sick needy patients who resort to us and trust us with the most precious thing they have, their lives. Thereby, we ought to be on top of our game and know everything- discovered to-date that can provide them with answers to their questions and help improve their outcomes, be it cure if possible, or quality of life and more time if not so possible.
- Medical attention to in- and out-patients (including floors/infusion unit/clinics) encompassing and understanding their psychological and emotional status as once again this builds our character and persona for hopefully a bright career ahead where we can meet all sorts of people in a variety of situations.
- Take part in multi-disciplinary rounds (both hematology and solid tumors) to be able to have a wider perspective of clinical cases, to figure out gaps of management and find solutions.
- Participate in continuous medical education with the spread of medical knowledge ( already existing via conferences/ review papers, or new data via trying to work on new studies/trials).



**Q: Prior to joining this department, where were you working?**

A: I am a Lebanese University- faculty of medical sciences (LU-FMS) graduate. I did my internship and residency in multiple LU- affiliated hospitals such as Sacre-Coeur Hospital, Rafik-Hariri University Hospital, Sahel General Hospital, Geitaoui Lebanese Hospital and Mount Lebanon Hospital, the latter of which I was the latest at before joining the AUBMC- Hem/Onc team.

**Q: Where did you pursue your college studies?**

A: Lebanese University-faculty of medical sciences

**Q: What do you like most about your job?**

A: I was always an over-achiever, top of my class all through school and even college. I was pulled into multiple different directions, especially that I come from a family of engineers. Nevertheless, I chose medicine because I thought this is where I can contribute to society the most. This is the place where people are most vulnerable, and I can actually help them and save lives. Hematology-oncology always seemed to be the biggest challenge with the word cancer being even tabooed in my community. I like challenge and I genuinely was set to help people around me and take part of the bigger picture. I enjoy interacting with people, hearing them out, providing them with a different view of their disease, of what they have in mind. I have always believed anything we set our mind to, we may be able to achieve, and I truly believe when our patients understand exactly what they have, and what we know about what they have, their treatment course would be easier for them and for us as physicians. Sometimes, we make it and celebrate with our patients, other times we don't. The important thing is that we try our best and ease the pain any way possible, and that is what I like the most about my job

**Q: What would you like to improve in your current job?**

A: Most of the time in our fellowship, we do not find enough time to do anything, and we tend to forget about ourselves, our humanity, and our goals. Policies and schedules keep on shifting, but I have noticed that time management is empirical. Regular team meetings to plan and keep focus can be quite helpful, and EDUCATION should always be the rule-breaker.

**Q: Tell us about your ambition; in what terms would you like to develop your career?**

A: e are living in very difficult times. Most people may be losing their ambition, but I believe there is always hope as long as we try and be positive and productive. I do see myself as a thriving hematologist-oncologist, maybe not only in Lebanon, maybe not right now/ right-away, but at some point. Everything needs time. Perhaps, for the time being, I can stress a bit more on the research part put more energy in it. Perhaps, I can play a role in the global development of cancer and cancer research, who knows?

**Q: Where is your best trip destination and why?**

A: I believe anywhere which makes you happy should be your destination. Every day is a different day with a different mindset. It could be Tibet today for its serenity, India tomorrow for its spiritual experience, Europe for its history, or just the forest next to your home for its beautiful nature, etc.. No best trip destination really.

**Q: What are your hobbies?**

A: I'm part Russian, and the Russian heritage took a big bulk of my up-bringing. I read, write, sing, ballroom dance, and play the guitar (a little bit). On the other hand, being Lebanese with Lebanon's amazing scenery got me to love hiking not to mention visiting all those absolutely stunning historical places. Then again, living just by the sea, one cannot go by without swimming, right?



## DR. ROLA AL SAYED

**Q: What would be your best food choice?**

A: Oh, I eat just about anything. I really like trying new stuff as well. So, I'm open to any suggestions. Just not bats or rats though! (Just saying)

**Q: Tell us more about your character.**

A: I may not be the best person to talk about myself. However, I think I'm quite a nice person. I'm very social, and that could at times get me into some trouble, but nothing not manageable. I don't want to sound pretentious, but I do consider myself intelligent, and can adapt relatively easily.

**Q: What is your advice to your peers?**

A: Be yourself. Never be scared to show your fangs when there is a need to. Always focus on your goals. Read, read, read as this, I think, was the best advice I have ever gotten, although I may have not been the best at following it, but I hope you will. Don't be so harsh on yourselves. Sometimes, things need time, time to adjust, adapt, understand, learn, metamorphose, grow and finally shine, thrive and soar.

**Q: What is your message to cancer patients?**

A: Everyone goes through obstacles in life. Believe in yourselves and believe you can make it. God has given us so much potential. Every time we get knocked down, we can rise again and fight back. Obstacles can re-shape us, but please do not allow them to destroy you. We're here for you, and we're trying to make things better. Science is not the same as it was a 100 years ago. Many advances have been established, and many new developments are underway. There are means to overcome this. Whatever it may be, stay strong!



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