

“The National Workshop on Maternal Mortality in Lebanon: A Call to Action”.

On March 27, 2004, a workshop under the title “The National Workshop on Maternal Mortality in Lebanon: A Call to Action” was held in Issam Fares Hall, AUB. This workshop was under the patronage of the Ministry of Public Health, and in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Health Sciences at AUB. The program started with a welcome address of the FHS, Dr. Huda Zurayk, welcome address of FM, Dr. Nadim Cortas, WHO representative, Dr. Habib Latiri, and address of the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Moh’d Ali Kannan representing H.E. Suleiman Franjeh. The workshop was divided into two sections: the first on Understanding Maternal Mortality, and the second on Reduction of Maternal Mortality.

Dr. Adnan Mroueh discussed the issue of maternal mortality, and described it as a form of social injustice, because women who die do not have a say in decision making, and as such it is our role to turn the slogan of “safe motherhood” into the belief that “motherhood is saved”. This workshop, he explained, is unique because it represents an inter-faculty partnership between the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Health Sciences. In addition, Dr. Mroueh added that the partnership could extend to include other faculties, as well as, agencies both governmental and non-governmental. Lastly, the diverse strengths of the partners can be utilized to raise awareness, mobilize resources, set priorities, and conduct research.

Dr. Huda Zurayk described maternal mortality as a serious, preventable problem, and the “tip of the iceberg”. It is caused by the lack of accessibility and health care to women. As such, this initiated a call to action, in order to develop a work plan to stop

maternal mortality, because women's lives have changed, they marry later, have fewer children, live longer, and are active in the labor force. Yet, they suffer a great deal of problems, ranging from cancer, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, osteoporosis, and others. Lastly, why women die in childbirth is the major question, she believes that the workshop should answer.

Dr. Nadim Cortas stated that there is a great disparity between maternal mortality rates in industrial and developing countries. Lebanon lies within the range of developing countries, and as such public awareness should be spread to provide and implement solutions for this problem. He believes that the initiative of a Women's Health Center ranks high, and represents a significant partnership with the FHS. Lastly, he added that a task force was put together for developing a WHC at AUBMC in order to move in a positive fashion and provide solutions to women who suffer.

Dr. Habib Latiri stated that the WHO tries to promote global awareness in various areas. Health is a fundamental right denied to a lot of women in the Arab world. Women die not because of disease, because pregnancy is not a disease, yet women still die of the complications that result from it. The shortest way to reduce maternal mortality, he stated, is to ensure that every pregnancy should be safe, every pregnant woman should have access, and all pregnant women should be able to reach a health care facility if complications should arise. Lastly, he added that the three major interventions that should be worked on include: access to family planning, mobilization of families, and assessing the skills of midwives and other practitioners who treat pregnant women.

Dr. Moh'd Ali Kanaan spoke about the grievance and magnitude of maternal mortality in Lebanon. He believes that it is important because it is a preventable issue. Physicians are only one player in this issue, and primary health care is very important because of the economic, social, cultural, and gender issues involved. Our figures in Lebanon, he believes, are very high if we compare them to the money we spend on health care in Lebanon. Lastly, he added that we have a lot of challenges to face, in terms of the collaboration between partners, leadership issue and the MOPH, and private Vs public sector health care institutions.

The other speakers in the workshop included Dr. Faysal El kak, Dr. Oona Campell, Dr. Anwar Nassar, Dr. Abdallah Adra, and Dr. Muheiddine Seoud. The workshop ended with an open panel discussion which included Dr. Oona Campbell, Dr. Moh'd Ali Kanaan, Dr. Habib Latiri, and Dr. Georges Kahdi. The panel discussed the challenges that we face in Lebanon while reporting reliable figures of maternal mortality, and the need for a National Audit Committee in order to study the pattern of maternal death among Lebanese women.

The event was ended with a pleasant lunch which the participants enjoyed at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel in Beirut.