

Friends and Family, Honoured guests, Distinguished faculty.....

Today we celebrate the completion of our advanced specialty training at AUBMC... and after so many long hours and stressful nights....I can say that it is quite an achievement... one that marks our entry into the realm of collegiality and professional responsibility. Yet it is only a milestone in the never ending journey of continuing education and training that are necessary to practice good medicine...and on this journey we have not been alone

To our families, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, friends and loved ones... thank you for supporting us while we supported others....and forgive us if we could not be there for you as you were for us... forgive us the countless times we couldn't spend time with you because we were at the hospital.... ...and our general grumpiness and angry moods after a night on callif we hadn't been able to vent to you ... I'm pretty sure we all would have either quit or been fired sooner or later . You have our infinite and loving gratitude

We thank the mentors and teachers who dedicated their time... and shared generously their wealth of knowledge and experience. Many are current world experts...others are repositories of history and medical wisdom, the veritable founding fathers of our hospital. We also thank AUB as an institution....personally it is my alma mater...and I still love it just as much as I did when I first joined in 1998. ... as to AUBMC in particular....it is an established and historical medical institution, one of the best if not the best in the region... And we are

proud to be a part of it... and yet AUBMC has newly started a process of redefining itself as an “institution of excellence” ...and one has to ask why ?...because we all know that we are far from perfect....and that we should gauge ourselves not by what is available but rather by what is achievable...It is this singular dedication to continued development, despite limited financial means...despite regional and domestic political instability... that is the hallmark of all things AUB ...

We see evidence of improvement daily and a deep commitment to education...We see it in Dean Sayegh’s 20/20 vision for AUBMC...in the leadership’s many policy changes...and in the tireless pursuit of ACGME accreditation by our GME office..... And there is always room for more improvementfor example...we should attract more international society conferences by mobilizing our alumni....and actively facilitate fellowships and workshops abroad for our residents...we should find innovative ways to increase our NSSF beds...as well as find funding for purely charitable beds....we have to increase our engagement with the community through various means such as mobile and satellite clinics(we know that the department of family medicine is doing great work there)....we have to strengthen and promote homegrown research publications and journals And finally we must introduce new ways of thinking into the community, boldly addressing taboo issues such as end of life care and patient autonomy.

As to the aspirations of the current graduates ... they are many...and so are their reservations and fears. We are entering a job market which is locally saturated....a problem which is compounded by the inexplicable licensing of more new medical schools...and a regional policy that prefers foreign certification and western nationalities... We are thus forced to join the vanguard of the infamous brain drain, leaving the country in pursuit of further training or in search of employment... however what is really frightening... is that contrary to previous generations, that left with heavy hearts and a promise to return as soon as possible...the members of this generation are leaving with a smile and a skip in their step...they are genuinely happy to leave and have full intention to establish their lives elsewhere...

Can one blame them for wanting to leave when they are expected to compete in a global economy and interconnected world while they still don't have 24 hour electricity and have the world's slowest internet connection...?...Can one blame them for giving up on a government that precipitates disorder and inefficiency in everything it touches?...Take for example the flagship in public healthcare, in which we all rotate, Rafic Hariri University Hospital.... It was planned to be a massive medical hub and it opened its doors with the most updated equipment and technology....but after only a few short years it now suffers from overstretching of resources, shortages of the most basic medical supplies and frequent equipment failure...oftentimes compromising patient care. It is a true tragedy...because out of all the late prime ministers namesakes it is the most important ...more important than any airport, stadium, or school ... and should be prioritized because it deals with the most basic of necessities ...that of health ..and it is to such public institutions that poor turn to...where

the helpless look for help....and it is there that we truly see the horror of healthcare inequality and the results of ignorance and neglect. Moreover, it is this same underprivileged population that is the most susceptible to the ministrations of charlatans and pseudophysicians, who do so much harm and so little good.... And finally they are the most likely to spend their hard earned money on so called “natural products” which have no inherent medicinal properties, the distributors of which have been allowed to operate freely and broadcast complete lies for ages.

On a more macroeconomic level, the root of the problem of healthcare in Lebanon is that the current model strongly favours costly hospital-based care as opposed to cost effective primary care..... i.e care that is given by GPs, Family physicians and internists in clinics..... In the current system, private insurance companies charge exorbitant premiums for outpatient services and the bulk of public healthcare funding goes to hospitals... ..and this results in two trends.... people either trying to fool the system and getting hospital admissions just to do simple tests....tests that can be done for much less on an outpatient basis.....or it results in people postponing medical care until they are sick enough to warrant a justifiable hospital admission...by the time of which they are so far gone, that their treatment bill is enormous. .This all translates into huge unsustainable costs ... which could be avoided by shifting some resources toward awareness, prevention of disease and early treatment.

Now where do we as physicians fit in all this? Are we powerless to affect change? Shouldn't we as the most educated part of society also

be the most vocal in our views...Shouldn't we be at the frontline when it comes to the denunciation of sectarianism, corruption, mismanagement, poor planning and the feudal politics? Of course we should...assuming that we are not part of the problem. Only last week the Lebanese Order of Physicians had cabinet elections. It was disappointing that the candidates did not have much to offer apart from generic campaign slogans.... some couldn't even offer me a coherent idea to discuss with them... and I can't help but wonder how many had real plans..... or even questions and issues....for example...I have a question... in the Order's zeal to raise retirement benefits it has increased tremendously initial registration feesI know at least from our own resident population that because of this, more and more are postponing joining the Order...some even foregoing it till after they come back from training abroad....the question is.... if there are less recently graduating physicians joining early... doesn't that mean there are less potential physicians paying annual subscription fees? Could that translate into actual indirect losses instead of gains? Based on what financial forecasts are these decisions made?

However, the sad truth is that the lack of clear agendas is nothing compared to the campaigns in of themselves....In all honesty, I believe they were an insult to the profession...in brief, they were mostly limited to a shameless barrage of short phone messages that stated the candidates' names and which political parties supported them...or worse still... witnessed the birth of sectarian physician groups and propaganda....and finally to crown it all, there innumerable last minute phone calls by this political party or that... and of course which party called you depended on where you lived or where you were

from...which only adds fuel to the fire of disunity and strengths divisive rhetoric.

Truly one would assume we are better than this...both candidates and voters...and it is very odd that we would adopt the herd mentality as quickly as anybody else. One must ask himself why do we act like this....? Many say ma “hayk mahsi el balad” ...we can’t do anything about it. Some surrender to indifference... some fervently point the finger at the government and external factors...And of course they draw the parallel with Lebanese abroad...who are model law-abiding citizens.... And very successful in nearly every endeavor they undertake which is obviously a good thing....and a testimony to the Lebanese entrepreneurial spirit and street smarts abroad....but it is also an extension of something is lurking at the core of Lebanese mentality that is not so good...the sometimes pathologic dedication to the promotion of ones own self, often regardless of the effect on othersmitel ma min 2ool bil libnani... “min ba3de 7mari..ma yunbut 7asheesh”and it is highly likely that this streak of selfishness helps Lebanese abroad succeed as individuals ...but also allows them to fail miserably at home as a groupand possibly why this country has so few true public servants ... people who would put the good of the country over the good of themselves.

But even if we wanted to do something, wouldn't it be just a wasted effort and in vain?...aren't we long past the point of no return? Are things such as non-sectarian governance... the curbing of corruption...transparency ...universal healthcare... better public services... just improbable dreams.? To be honest... sometimes it feels as such. But there is always hope...just a few weeks ago I was reading an article by two prominent economists dealing with the problem of

tackling poverty in some of the most corrupt and backward nations....nations that make Lebanon seem like a utopia..... and it argues the notion of the positive ripple effect...the idea that implementing one good policy or public initiative...by even the smallest group of people... will encourage others to do the same...and that in turn will kick-start a cycle of public benefit and initiative that will only get bigger and bigger....which is why we applaud Dr Sharaf Abu Sharaf, the President of the Order of Physicians for instigating policy change... even if we don't agree on the details.....and why we applaud Dr Mohammad Jawad Khalifeh, the Minister of health, for all the initiatives and progress he has already done... To be honest, it is a mystery how he is able to manage such things in the current situation....and finally why we applaud AUB itself for being the birthplace of so much talent and creativity...and being the best force for change in Lebanon and the region...

On this note, I urge my fellow physicians old and young to fulfill their duties as responsible and educated citizens...and to reaffirm that while we should be above the inane and petty squabbling that is broadcast on every local TV channel.... we are not above caring for our country. ...I urge them to vocalize their opinions on key issues...to promote the principles of toleration and caring that are the foundations of our profession... and to take time off from their career ambitions to give back freely and unconditionally for the public good

And In the words of John F Kennedy... **Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country"**

God bless you all

God Bless AUB

God bless Lebanon