



B A L S A M Q U A R T E R L Y

November 2021

Support · Care · Guidance

عناية · احتضان · إرشاد

D E S P I T E D I F F I C U L T I E S



Since the end of 2019, with outbreak of COVID 19, the deteriorating economic and financial situation throughout Lebanon and the August 4 explosion, sustaining work at Balsam has been quite a challenge.

As with so many others in Beirut, the August 4 explosion left its many marks on Balsam. It greatly affected our donations, two of our nurses, Karen and Maya, left

Lebanon, and meanwhile the number of patient referrals increased significantly as more and more people could not afford to go to hospital and resorted to home care. Despite all this, work at Balsam has continued unabated. We fought hard to find a balance between our responsibility towards the safety and wellbeing of our staff and maintaining our services to our patients and their families. We were lucky we had the infrastructure and the leadership to allow us to adapt our work without interruption as the need arose. Our Distance Support program, established in 2015 to address the needs of patients and families outside Greater Beirut by providing telephone and virtual support regardless of location, was adapted to confront the new situation. Nurses worked on patient care calls 24/7; conducting online meetings, video calls, etc. Our social worker continued through phone and video calls to provide emotional and social support to patients and their families, reassuring them and guiding them while empowering the caregivers to provide effective care and support to their loved ones. In addition to Distance Support care, nurses carried out emergency visits where a situation arose requiring immediate intervention.

In short, Balsam nurses demonstrated the utmost commitment and dedication. Nothing deterred them from their mission – whether road closures, street violence, the pandemic, the financial meltdown, the fuel and gas crises - nothing stopped the Balsam team from caring for their patients and helping them to achieve the best possible quality life until the very end. We salute our hardworking staff for their commitment under these circumstances.

THE BALSAM INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT INITIATIVE



To help our team to cope during these challenging times, the Balsam International Support Initiative (BISI) was conceived as a support mechanism. This initiative brought together six highly experienced international palliative care

specialist physicians in order to participate in the team's weekly Inter Disciplinary Team (IDT) meetings via Zoom. Each international consultant dedicated time to 3–4 meetings between January and June 2021 providing guidance and knowledge about approaches to patient care.

The first 6 months of BISI proved to be an extremely positive experience for both the Balsam team and the consultants. The meetings were not only an opportunity for learning and professional growth for Balsam staff, but also the input of the experts was extremely validating. It reminded the team of the value and importance of their work at a time when it was easy to lose sight of this. The consultants also appreciated the dialogue and cultural exchanges which gave them a chance to learn about how palliative care is practiced in the Lebanese context and how they could effectively support a team dedicated to providing palliative care under these challenging circumstances.

In its second iteration, BISI will expand beyond the weekly IDT with physicians to include monthly case discussion with experts in nursing, social work, psychology and chaplaincy.

TRAINING, LEARNING AND BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Rebecca and Janane, two of our pioneer, clinical nurse specialists, pursued a Fellowship in Palliative Care, by taking part in an advanced course run by the Institute of Palliative Medicine in India in partnership with Sanjeevan Palliative

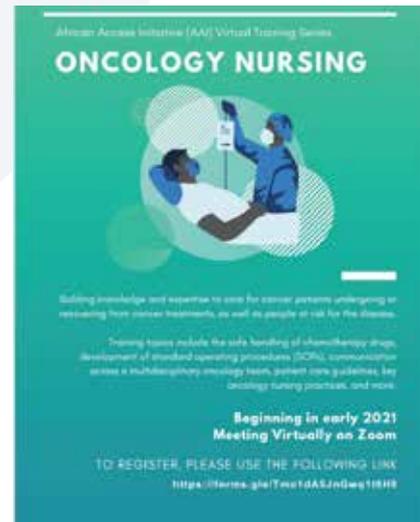
Care Project, St Christopher's Hospice, and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. The six-month Fellowship course is the Winner of the European Association of Palliative Care (EAPC)/European Palliative Care Academy (EUPCA) 'Leadership in Education Award 2021. Rebecca and Janane were ranked second and third among 120 international participants from different professions.



We are also so proud to say that in 2020 Janane was selected as a pioneer nurse in palliative care by a program that celebrates palliative care in nursing led by St Christopher's Hospice, London.



Balsam physician, Joe Khoury, has also been busy with training and learning activities. He was invited by BIO Ventures for Global Health (BVGH) to participate as a speaker in their virtual “Francophone Oncology Nursing”, under the auspices of their African Access Initiative. This course aims to provide nurses in French speaking Africa with educational resources and training to improve their knowledge and skills to practice in an oncology setting and to deliver safe, high quality and comprehensive patient care. The course aims to both empower nurses and standardize the practice of oncology nursing patient care. The program ran over several days; Dr Khoury presented the topic: Concepts and Misconceptions about Palliative Care.



Rana Yamout, another very active Balsam physician, gave a talk in June 2021 as part of the weekly staff meeting of the palliative care team at Centre Hospitalier Public d’Hauteville in France. The topic was interventional pain management in palliative care. Dr Yamout also took part in the 22nd EPEC Pediatrics Train the Trainer Conference in September 2021.

22nd BECOME AN EPEC-PEDIATRICS TRAINER Conference
Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care (EPEC) - Pediatrics
 September 27-30, 2021 | San Francisco, CA (virtual)



About the Program

The EPEC-Pediatrics curriculum features state-of-the-art knowledge in pain and symptom management and training in the skills required to address key domains for pediatric palliative care. The program is designed to give pediatric healthcare professionals (incl. physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, psychologists etc.) the knowledge and skills needed to provide excellent palliative care to their patients and their families.

Registration includes

- 4-day virtual conference attendance with live plenary and small-group breakout sessions
- Access to 18 self-study online modules on pain and symptom management, grief and bereavement, child development, and more
- Receipt of all training materials in the curriculum upon successful completion of the course AND 18 online modules, including:
 - 24 PowerPoint Presentations
 - A comprehensive teaching handbook for each module to teach interdisciplinary teams
 - Trigger videos



Some Balsam team members took part in 'Family Medicine in Times of Crises', where palliative care professionals discussed how palliative care can benefit family physicians and enable them to provide more holistic care to their patients. Team members who participated included Balsam's physicians Aline Zakhem and Joe Khoury, social worker Hiba Makke and Balsam's president Dr. Salah Zeineddine.

16:30 - 19:15 VIRTUAL SESSION III: PALLIATIVE CARE FOR THE FAMILY PHYSICIAN: DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY CARE TO YOUR PATIENTS	
Moderators	Salam Jaloul, MD - Hadi Ghanem, MD - Pamela Farah, MD
16:30 - 17:00	Primary Palliative Care: What Every Family Physician Should Know Joe El Khoury, MD
17:00 - 17:30	I Want My Patients to Live Longer And Better - Early Palliative Care Can Help! Frank Ferris, MD
17:30 - 18:00	My Patient is Dying! Managing the Last Hours of Life Effectively Khairat Al Habbal, MD
18:00 - 18:30	Introducing Advance Care Planning in Family Practice in Lebanon: How to Help my Patients Decide for Themselves Salah Zeineddine, MD
18:30 - 19:15	<u>ROUND TABLE: CARE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: FROM PALLIATIVE CARE TO GLOBAL HEALTHCARE</u> Telehealth in the Wake of Social Unrest and Lockdown: A Successful Lebanese Experience Aline El Zakhem, MD New Ethical Dilemmas in the Covid-19 Pandemic Molly Kilpatrick, MD Health Care During the Financial Crisis: Real Life Challenges and Solutions Hiba Makke, MSW

In September 2021, Dr. Hibah Osman also gave a presentation in the WHO EMRO regional expert network in Cairo.

PROMOTING PALLIATIVE CARE AWARENESS IN LEBANON

In Lebanon, the growing need for palliative care is largely unmet. According to a report published in 2017, an estimated 15,000 patients a year require palliative care services throughout the country. Yet, there is an evident lack of awareness about palliative care along with significant misconceptions about palliative care among the general public.

To confront this situation, two Balsam team members, Janane Hanna and Rebecca El Asmar, decided to embark on a project to raise awareness about palliative care in Lebanon. They devised a public awareness campaign via social media in the



form of clear and simple messages from Balsam team members and stakeholders, through family testimonials, as well as interviews on TV, radio and in newspaper articles, often in partnership with other NGOs. The theme encompasses living well despite difficult illness and follows the #DespiteDifficulties, **العناية التلطيفية رغم صعوبات الحياة مع المرض # رغم_صعوبات**

On October 26, 2021 our nurse Chadia Fayad and social worker Hiba Makke went live on Sawt kel lebnen Live with Rohny El Khoury, to discuss the benefits of Palliative Care and how it can be tailored to each patient and family's specific needs. It was a great opportunity for us to spread awareness about the importance of Palliative Care in healthcare.



D O N A T I O N S F R O M S U P P O R T E R S

We are extremely grateful for all donations we received from our patients, families and supporters. These came in both monetary and non-monetary form; including medications and medical equipment. Our wonderful, caring team members of doctors, nurses and staff also made monetary donations to support our mission during these tough times, while Dr. Joe Khoury brought much needed medications on his way back from France to help as many families as we could.



A BIG AND WARM THANK YOU TO OUR NURSES

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our nurses for all their hard work, commitment and dedication. Without them, we could not be where we are today. Below is one of many letters of appreciation received from Balsam's patients



Dear Ms. Fayad,

Hope this email finds you well. I want to thank you and Balsam for taking care of my dearest grandmother Nouhad Sakr, and for providing her and our family with the utmost professional and tender care during our difficult time. As my father has discussed with you, she was recently diagnosed with metastatic ovarian cancer with peritoneal nodules. Given the disease prognosis and her significant comorbidities, I highly recommended the palliative care route and Balsam came to my mind as I remember my encounters with the NGO back when I was a medical student at AUB. I advised and spoke to the family about the focus on quality of life and not going after heroic feats that might not go in line with her wishes. All in hope of allowing her to live with her disease on her own terms like she has always lived.

I recognize your organization's hard work especially during these times in Lebanon and want to salute and commend your bravery for being a lending hand to our family while I am abroad.

WORDS FROM THE HEART... A PATIENT'S STORY



Dear Balsam.

It's been now five months since my Mom has passed. Few words describe the feeling of emptiness that have gloomed over me since her death.

Back in August 2020, my Mom said she was feeling pain in her abdomen. Very quickly, the diagnosis revealed she was in the late stage of cancer. She had small cell lung cancer all over her body. The news felt like a bullet went through me. She lived alone in Lebanon and my brothers lived away from her.

In hindsight, everything happened extremely fast. In 8 months, she was gone. She started chemotherapy and took all sorts of medication. She quickly lost her hair. I bought her a soft yellow cap to warm her head and it brightened her face every time she wore it.

Everything felt like a battle against fate. Not only was it confinement time all over the world due to Covid-19 with distressing travel restrictions, but also the painful crisis in Lebanon only added another level of difficulty. Medications were rationed or out of stock. Life was getting more expensive day by day. My brothers Hadi, Simon and I had to navigate a jungle of predators with our limited knowledge and not so fluent Arabic level.

By the time the situation got out of hand – Mom had lost the mobility in her legs - we had to reach out for help. This is where Balsam got involved. I don't know how we'd have managed, had we waited a few more days. Chadia and Hiba immediately showed up with help. Chadia would offer medical knowledge and visit us regularly to check up on my Mom. Hiba would give us moral support on every topic we needed to discuss. It was such a relief to know we were in good hands and could rely on them. In such distressing times, they were like an anchor in a stormy sea. I think that in addition to the fact that they offered precious and incomparable help, it was the most moving human experience I have ever lived. It was beautiful to discover the solidarity and the amount of love and care that could be shared. I will forever be grateful for their generosity towards not only my Mom and us but also to all the other families accompanying their loved one through their last days.

My brothers and I were alone in this process. Balsam provided us with guidance and comfort even after my Mom passed. They helped us make the difficult choice of stopping the chemotherapy treatment. When you're the one going through hell, it's difficult to make rational and beneficial choices. That's why having professionals with great experience becomes crucial. It's a deep fight between how much you can handle to see your loved one suffer and how much you can let them go.

I have grown so much since. It still pains my heart daily to have lost my mother at such a young age. She will not be there to see me graduate but she follows me in my heart. As I reflect on these things I am writing, I remind myself that Mom would be proud of how strong I proved to be.

I will always remember how she used to fall asleep with a smile on her face, and her yellow beanie.

Thank you, Balsam.

Lorena Chamoun Medeiros

CHANGES IN BALSAM TEAM

We would like to update you on a few changes in our Balsam team in 2021. After six years as Balsam's Operation Manager, Roula Doughan stepped down to embark on a new journey in Dubai. Throughout her time at Balsam, Roula managed to create beautiful relationships with team members, support the necessary expansion of Balsam and enhance workflow and the work environment. Roula also assumed the role of Executive Director before leaving Balsam. We wish Roula the best of luck, and are very pleased to say that she is a Balsam Board Member.



Dana Abou Zeki took over as Balsam's new Operation Manager. Dana holds an MBA and BBA from AUB and has a financial and management consulting background. She worked for PwC, Deloitte consulting and the US Department of Labor before moving back to Beirut.

Leaving the corporate world to follow her passion, she became a certified mindfulness coach, a yoga and meditation teacher and has been working in the NGO field for the past year. We are very happy to welcome Dana as a new addition to Balsam's team.

On a final note, our nurses Maya Abdul Rahman and Karen Rbeiz have left Lebanon to pursue both education and career opportunities abroad. We would like to take this opportunity to also wish them the best of luck with their new ventures. We will miss them.

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Thank you

