



AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

From Dr. Walid Ahmar, President of ALMA

Dear Colleagues,

As 2014 draws to an end I would like to reflect on some of the achievements and progress of ALMA. Firstly we have established the first formal inter-hospital relationship between Australia and Lebanon between MonashHealth in Melbourne and St George University Hospital in Beirut Lebanon. This is an exciting establishment and will come into fruition in 2015. Secondly, the sponsoring of memorandum of understanding between the Lebanese Society of Cardiology and MonashHeart. This will foster the exchange of fellows, cardiologists and researchers between both countries. ALMA in Victoria also in partnership with the Heart Foundation, the Anti-Cancer Council and Quit Victoria have proposed an amendment to the Tobacco Act in Victoria to prohibit waterpipe smoking in cafes, bars and restaurants. We will work with the new Government and Opposition to implement this change. Finally we saw the formal launch of ALMA in NSW. This is an exciting chapter for all us and through a considered and planned approach we hope to make ALMA successful in the state of NSW.

We will be having our second Biannual ALMA Ball in Victoria and I wish to extend an invitation to all ALMA members, their families, friends and the wider Lebanese community.

I want to thank all the ALMA committee members past and present for all their help and hard work throughout 2014.

Finally I wish to extend to you and your families a joyous and meaningful Christmas period to all those celebrating Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year to you and your families.

- UPCOMING EVENTS -

ALMA Ball 2015

The Melbourne 2015 ALMA Ball will be held at the **Luxor Ballroom** at The Luxor Reception in Taylors Lakes on **Saturday 28th February 2015**. We warmly welcome you all to attend this event with your family and friends. Tickets are \$90 per person and are available now.

For those wishing to purchase tickets please contact:

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Lebanon's 71st Anniversary of Independence: Health Minister Address



Several members of the community and ALMA board members gathered in Brighton Town Hall last month to celebrate the 71st anniversary of Lebanon's independence. The night was

hosted by the Consulate General of Lebanon, Mr. Ghassan El Khatib, who relished in the many achievements of the Australian Lebanese community. The Minister for Health (Hon David Davis) addressed guests and congratulated the Lebanese community on its strong positive contribution to the social, economic and political fabric of the country. Member of parliament, Mr. Nazih El Asmar, also commemorated the many advancements of the Australian Lebanese community. ALMA and its role in the establishment of ties with St George Hospital permitting inter-hospital relations was spoken of with great praise and positivity by both the Health Minister and The Lebanese Consul General, also highlighting the progress that our association has made in the medical sector.



Left to right: Mr. Omar Baarini, Hon David Davis, Mr. Ghassan El Khatib, Dr Walid Ahmar, Dr Cathy Soufan, Dr Maroun Francis



ALMA Family Day

The annual ALMA Family Day event was held on Sunday November 30th at Koonara Hall. Among the many activities provided, a gymbus was present for the kids to enjoy and plenty of Lebanese dishes were brought for all to share.

ALMA family day is an event that serves as the perfect platform for our members to invite their family and friends to meet one another, network and become more informed of the role that ALMA plays in the wider community.

ALMA Community Talks

ALMA has begun providing talks to multiple community groups throughout Melbourne. These community health awareness talks are vital in enabling ALMA to raise health awareness in our community.



Drug & Alcohol Talk

We held a Drug and Alcohol awareness talk in August targeted at the youth. This talk highlighted the many negative repercussions of drug and alcohol use and abuse namely concerning teenagers within Australia. The welcoming format of the session provided the teens with a comfortable environment to ask questions and stimulated many interesting discussions.

Lecture slides from the talk are in the process of being made accessible at the ALMA website:
<http://auslma.org.au>

Cardiovascular Disease & Prevention Talk

The Druze community in Dandenong and The Maronite/Orthodox community both received talks focused on cardiovascular disease last month. The talks described the symptoms of a heart attack and basic measures to take if one is presumed to be having a cardiac event. Education on appropriate eating habits and other preventative actions were also presented. These talks were given by ALMA in conjunction with the Heart Foundation and Ambulance Victoria.

ALMA 2015 BALL:**MonashHealth****The LUXOR RECEPTION on SATURDAY 28th FEBRUARY 2015**

We warmly welcome you to the 2nd Biannual ALMA Ball which will be held on Saturday 28th February 2015 at the Luxor Reception (503 Sydenham Rd, Taylors Lakes) at 6.30pm. Tickets are now on sale at \$90 per person.

Among the entertainment of the evening, the night will showcase singers Mr. Louis Kattoura and Mr. Fahmi Barakat.

We are pleased to announce that at the 2015 ALMA Ball we will be awarding **Inaugural ALMA Achievement Awards**. This award will recognize the achievements of our ALMA health professionals, in particular the hard work that those have done and the excellence they have shown in the health sector over the years. These individuals have left a significant legacy and have contributed positively to our community and the wider Australian community.

The awardees can come from a wide range of health related areas including; medical practice, nursing, research etc. Nomination forms will be available soon and e-mailed to you so take the time to think about someone in the community whom you would like to see nominated and acknowledged for their body of work.

ALMA Internal Education Meeting

Our last ALMA educational dinner meeting was held at the Hellenic Republic, and featured Professor Ray Hachem and Dr Ali Bazrgan. Professor Hachem is from the Anderson Cancer Center in Houston Texas and is an internationally renowned researcher in the field of Infectious Diseases. Professor Hachem is a past President of the USA Lebanese Medical Association and is member of the International Lebanese Medical Association founding committee.

Dr Bazrgan is a Hematologist and researcher at St Vincent's Hospital. His talk focused on new oral anti-coagulation agents.

These talks were thoroughly rewarding and enjoyable and we thank both of our speakers for their time.

Lebanese Cardiology Conference November 2014

This year's Lebanese Cardiology conference was held on November 5-8th at the Hilton Habtoor. **Dr Walid Ahmar was the first Australian to present at this conference on his cardiological research. It was attended by the Australian Embassy staff. During the conference a memorandum of Understanding was signed between The Lebanese Society of Cardiology and MonashHeart-represented by Walid.**

ALMA Achievements over the last 12 months

Here is a list of some of the achievements of ALMA and it's members:

- Establishment of an inter-hospital relationship between MonashHealth and St George University Hospital in Beirut
- Community Health Awareness Talks
- Establishment of a NSW ALMA branch
- Founding member of the International Lebanese Medical Association
- Internal ALMA educational Talks
- Royal Children's Hospital Annual Appeal Donation
- Annual ALMA family day
- Appointment of Afaf Haddad as visiting Associate Professor in Pathology at Notre Dame University campus at Werribee
- Australian Lebanese Association Award to Dr Walid Ahmar for Heart Awareness educational talks to the community
- First Lebanese Cardiology oral presentations by an Australian Cardiologist at The Annual Lebanese Interventional meeting in Beirut in 2013 by Dr Walid Ahmar

WaterPipe Press Conference Led by ALMA October 22nd 2015

The following is an extract of the press conference on Waterpipe prohibition:

A coalition of public health groups have today called for legislative reform to bring waterpipe use, sale and advertising in line with other tobacco laws in Victoria.

A waterpipe (also known as a hookah or shisha among other names) is an instrument for vaporising and smoking flavoured tobacco called shisha, in which the vapour or smoke is passed through a water basin before inhalation.

Quit Victoria, the Heart Foundation and Cancer Council Victoria are backing the Australian-Lebanese Medical Association's (ALMA) campaign for reform ahead of next month's state election.

ALMA President, Dr Walid Ahmar, said the campaign, which enjoys strong cross-cultural and community support, aims to close a loophole in the *Tobacco Act 1987* whereby waterpipes can still be smoked in an enclosed workplace.

"Since 1 March 2006, smoking has been banned in enclosed workspaces (including restaurants and bars) in Victoria. Despite this, waterpipe tobacco continues to be smoked indoors at shisha cafes as the Act's definition of 'tobacco product' fails to include waterpipe tobacco," Dr Ahmar said.

"Given the well-known and documented health impacts of secondhand smoke, it is unacceptable to continue to expose staff and customers to this risk because of a legislative oversight.

"We seek from a future State Government, an amendment to the definition of 'tobacco product' which would see the use of waterpipes and other similar products banned in enclosed workplaces, such as at shisha bars and cafes."

Quit Victoria Policy Manager, Kylie Lindorff, said waterpipe smoke contains many of the same toxins as cigarette smoke.

"This includes substances like carbon monoxide, nicotine and heavy metals that cause cardiovascular disease, lung disease, cancer and addiction," Ms Lindorff said.

"We know that waterpipe smoking contributes to the build-up of toxic levels of indoor secondhand smoke pollution.

"Research shows that a single person smoking a waterpipe indoors for up to 30 minutes produces, on average, more fine particles than smoking a cigarette.

"This effect is magnified when a waterpipe is shared among a group, increasing the level of harm staff and patrons are exposed to.

"For these compelling reasons Quit fully supports ALMA's call for legislative reform in the interests of public health."

Cancer Council Victoria CEO, Todd Harper, said Victoria is the only Australian state that does not prohibit waterpipe smoking in enclosed workplaces.

"As a result, a number of establishments allow and promote the smoking of waterpipes indoors, potentially

Dr Walid Ahmar and Ms Diane Heggie CEO of The Heart Foundation at the Press Conference



International Lebanese Medical Association (ILMA)

On an International front, we have established the International Lebanese Medical Association. This Association comprises of members from Australia, Brazil, France, Belgium, Canada and USA.

We have established a website www.intlma, which will also allow you to also link in with the various National Associations in the near future.

We are very excited to announce our **International Launch and inaugural conference** which is to be held in **Beirut Lebanon during 8-10 July 2015**. During this meeting we will formalize the establishment of ILMA with representatives from all the involved nations present together with key members of the Lebanese Government and other Health Officials.

The ILMA board will comprise of 2 members from each country involved. These 2 members will report to the National ALMA executive and to the state branches.

We will provide you with further information regarding this meeting and we strongly encourage you all to attend and hopefully present at the sessions which are to be formalized in the coming months.

Memorandum of Understanding Between Lebanon and Australia

MonashHealth

A memorandum of Understanding was signed between MonashHealth and St George University Hospital in Beirut on November 7th 2014 at Bishop Audi's residence in Beirut. Mr. Adam Horsburgh the chief operations manager from MonashHealth was present to sign this agreement along with the Bishop and the CEO of St George University Hospital Mr. Salam Rayes. Also in attendance was Mr. Mark Russell from the Australian Embassy.

This is an inaugural signing between two health institutions involving Lebanon and Australia. The agreement was facilitated by ALMA. This was fully supported by The Lebanese and Australian Governments. It will allow the exchange of students, doctors, nurses, health professionals and researchers between both countries.

A further signing was undertaken by Dr Walid Ahmar President of ALMA, Bishop Audi and Mr. Adam Horsburgh in recognition of the work performed by ALMA in sponsoring the agreement. Dr Ahmar awarded Bishop Audi with a certificate from ALMA recognizing this inaugural event.



NSW ALMA Launch

We are proud to announce that the NSW chapter of ALMA was launched in October at the residence of the Consul General of NSW His Excellency Mr. George Bitar. It was very rewarding to see many new and enthusiastic faces. There is a lot of hard work to be undertaken in NSW, but under the Honorary Leadership of Dr Fred Nasser and the NSW committee we look forward to its maturation in 2015.

There will be a National ALMA executive with representatives from both branches in Victoria and NSW which will allow ALMA to work nationally and at a state level in a cohesive and united front with each state supporting and guiding one another.