



AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

President's Message

We have commenced 2016 in a busy manner. We have commenced it with the historic St George University Hospital MonashHealth agreement being launched in Melbourne. This is the first ever formal agreement between Lebanon and Australia in the health sector. It will help promote the exchange of health professionals between Lebanon and Australia. We have the first doctor coming from Beirut in May this year to commence a 2 year fellowship in colorectal surgery.

We have our member education talks commencing in April in Victoria. ALMA is hoping to establish a student body in 2016 and we encourage you to invite students that you are aware of to contact us to be on our registry.

ALMA is excitedly expanding into South Australia and Queensland in 2016. In addition to ALMA being registered in Victoria and NSW it will be registered in these two new states this year. We are aiming to have a national ALMA committee once these two states are on board to form a truly national ALMA body.

I shall keep you updated with progress.

Dr Walid Ahmar

March 2016



The international delegation from St George Hospital, Beirut, Lebanon with Hon Jill Hennessy, Dr Walid Ahmar, Monash Health CEO and Board Chair, Lebanese Consul General Mr Ghassan El Khatib, Hon Nazih El Asmar and Hon Cesar Melhem.



L-R: Monash Health Cardiologist & Australian Lebanese Medical Association President, Dr Wally Ahmar; Hon Jill Hennessy, Minister for Health & Ambulance Services; Barbara Yeoh, Monash Health Board Chair; & Mr Salam Rayes, CEO of St George Hospital. Certificates presented by Dr Walid Ahmar to the Health Minister, The MonashHealth Chair and the CEO of St George Hospital on behalf of the Australian Lebanese Medical Association to mark the event.

Monash Health marks partnership with St George Hospital pioneered by The Australian Lebanese Medical Association

On Wednesday 3 February, Monash Health welcomed an international delegation to mark the signing of a goodwill agreement between Monash Medical Centre and St George Hospital University Medical Centre in Beirut, Lebanon.

The Hon Jill Hennessy, Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, attended the event and spoke of the Victorian Government's support of this partnership - the first of its kind in the Australian healthcare sector. Archbishop Paul Saliba from Sydney, representing the Orthodox Antioch church in Australia and representing Archbishop Audi in Beirut was in attendance, in addition to the Lebanese State politicians the Hon Nazih El Asmar and the Hon Cesar Melhem.

Saint George Hospital in Beirut is a non-profit community hospital established in 1878. Today, the hospital has grown into a healthcare institution, providing overall in-patient services to the community. Its values of compassion, respect, integrity, safety and pursuit of excellence are synonymous with Monash Health's own values.

As part of the visit to Melbourne, Mr Salam Rayes, CEO of Saint George Hospital and his delegation is spending several days visiting medical and surgical units across Monash Health to share insights into modern healthcare.

Chief Executive Shelly Park said: "The partnership with St George Hospital aligns very well with one of Monash Health's Strategic Priorities – *"we partner strategically for outstanding outcomes"*.

The partnership has been facilitated by MonashHeart cardiologist Dr Walid Ahmar, President of the Australian Lebanese Medical Association and the Lebanese Consul General, Mr Ghassan El Khatib.

It will enable training, research and exchange of clinical staff (medical and nursing) as well as future research partnerships.

In May a young surgical trainee from St George Hospital Dr Elias Sakaily will work within our Gastro Surgery team for two years as a fellow. Other opportunities of exchange for doctors and nursing staff will be explored in coming months.

We also want to thank His Excellency Mr Ghassan El Khatib, the Consul General of Victoria for generously hosting the celebration reception and dinner at his residence post the launch.



Yarra Boat Cruise with ALMA committee and St George Delegation



Archbishop Paul Saliba and ALMA members, St George CEO Mr Salam Rayes and Dr Paul el Hage from St George with guests at the Lebanese Consul General's residence reception dinner.

ALMA and Waterpipe Issue in Victoria

As many maybe aware in Victoria the State Government is in the process of reviewing its tobacco laws. ALMA has been active in this process and we are in particular looking at addressing the anomaly where waterpipe smoking is permitted in public places e.g. cafes, restaurants yet cigarette smoking is banned. We have been in meetings with Government officials since 2014. We are asking the State Government to reassess this and bring waterpipe smoking in line with cigarette smoking. This requires a change to the current Act of Parliament which states that a tobacco product must contain more than 50% of its product to be deemed prohibitable e.g. cigarette smoking and not waterpipe. We are asking that this be changed to include any substance containing tobacco in line with all other states of Australia. A position statement has been formulated by ALMA, the Heart Foundation, the Anti-Cancer Council and QUIT Victoria. Below is a letter sent by Dr Walid Ahmar to the Premier of Victoria supported by multiple ethnic associations in Victoria as well as the AMA.

We will keep you informed as to the progress on the matter. At the end of the newsletter is a copy of the letter sent to the Premier of Victoria and The Victorian Health Minister.

ALMA in Australia

ALMA's goal since its beginnings has been to become a truly national association.

NSW

ALMA in 2015 became a registered association in NSW. It joins Victoria in becoming a registered body.

ALMA in NSW is holding elections to form an elected committee on April 5th at Bankstown Library Level 2 Lansdowne Room 1 80 Rickard rd. Bankstown at 730pm. All Health professionals in NSW are invited to attend and to nominate for positions on the evening on the ballot paper that will be provided.

We want to thank the prior foundation committee for their work.

ALMA Establishing Chapters in South Australia and Queensland

This year our aim is to have ALMA also established and registered in South Australia and Queensland. We are in the process of establishing foundation committees in both these states and hence are on the path to form national association.

Future National ALMA Executive

Once all states have chapters of ALMA a National ALMA committee with equal representatives from all states will be established. There will be a national leadership structure/committee, which will co-ordinate with all the states in progressing ALMA as a united and coordinated association. Each state's has it's own individual needs and priorities which will be respected by the national committee. The goals of ALMA are however the thread that will bind all the branches together.

One of our long term goal's will be to have a national ALMA conference where health professionals can come together from all the state branches for a health conference or forum in all areas of health. This is hoped to occur within the next 24 months.

Student ALMA



One of our goals is to form a student ALMA body. This will allow our students studying health to come together and form networks and student collegiality. Additionally we aim to mentor these students in the careers and offer them advice from our senior ALMA colleagues.

We want to offer our students scholarships, which we have on offer at present.

Additionally we are aiming to establish an ALMA Foundation specifically to cater for our students.

Any ALMA students that you may be aware of please ask them to e-mail Mariam Hachem on:

mariamhachem11@gmail.com

ALMA Member Education Talks

In Victoria we have our upcoming member education evening on **April 28th at 630pm for 7pm at Matteo's Restaurant**. The two round table dinner talks are focused on Diabetes and Psychiatry. A panel from our ALMA members will help conduct these two topics in conjunction with the two expert speakers. The dinner is fully sponsored by Servier.

ALMA Community Education Talks

These talks, which have been enthusiastically embraced by our Victorian Lebanese community, will continue this year. The community topics included are:

1. Organ Donation
2. Heart Awareness and Waterpipe issues
3. Diabetes and its consequences
4. Men's and Women's health issues
5. Mental illness, drug and alcohol



The International Lebanese Medical Association

In 2015 the International Lebanese Medical Association was launched in Beirut, which was followed by an inaugural conference. Since then ILMA has grown to have 15 countries on board.

In 2017 there will be an ILMA conference to be held in Beirut. Most likely July or September. We hope to have (as we did last year) speakers from Australia to present at this meeting. We are in the process of formalizing this event and will keep you updated.

As part of ILMA Dr Walid Ahmar is establishing along with the Lebanese Society of Cardiology President Dr Sobhi Dahdah an ILMA cardiology sub-group. The aim is to bring together cardiologists from around the world including distinguished members such as Prof William Zoghbi former ACC president and Prof Gebran Khoury Belgium Cardiothoracic surgeon.

Please e-mail Walid your interest:

wally.ahmar@cmcvictoria.com.au



17th March 2016

The Hon Mr Daniel Andrews

Premier of Victoria

Dear Premier,

I am writing to you regarding the Australian Lebanese Medical Association's health concerns surrounding the proliferation and usage of waterpipe tobacco smoking in Victoria.

Traditionally, waterpipes or a hookah has been used in the Middle East, Africa and India for smoking tobacco and other substances. A hookah is a waterpipe used to pass charcoal heated air through a tobacco mixture and subsequently through a water-filled chamber. The user inhales the water filtered smoke through a tube and mouthpiece. The tobacco mixtures in the hookahs vary in composition with some having flavourings and additives.

There is a misconception that waterpipes are a relatively safe method of smoking tobacco. However there is very good evidence to the contrary. Waterpipes usage for smoking tobacco is associated with:

1. Serious potential health hazards to smokers and those exposed to the smoke it emits which can cause lung, bladder, stomach, oesophageal and oral cancer in addition to development of coronary artery disease, reduced lung function and decreased fertility;
2. A typical 1 hour session involves inhaling 100-200 times the volume of smoke inhaled with a single cigarette. Additionally the amount of smoke inhaled in atypical session is approximately 90,000ml compared with 500-600mls inhaled when smoking cigarettes;
3. The smoke produced contains a high level of toxic compounds including carbon monoxide, heavy metals and cancer causing chemicals;
4. Heat sources used to burn the tobacco such as charcoal are likely to increase the health risks as when they are combusted they produce their own toxic products which include carbon monoxide, metals and cancer causing chemicals;
5. Pregnant women and the unborn child are vulnerable to the exposure of the smoke toxicants- either directly or indirectly;
6. Non-smokers are also at risk due to the second-hand smoke from the tobacco mixture;
7. The sharing of the mouthpiece also poses a health risk for transmission of potential diseases.



Despite the negative health effects of tobacco waterpipes, their use is growing as they are becoming more popular in bars, cafes and restaurants.

The Australian Lebanese Medical Association recommends that tobacco waterpipes be subjected to the same regulation as cigarette smoking and other tobacco products and should include appropriate health warnings. This is recommended by the World Health Organisation and supported by other health groups we work closely with, including the Heart Foundation (Victoria), Cancer Council Victoria, the Australian Medical Association (Victoria) and Quit Victoria. This position also enjoys support from multiple ethnic groups in our community, including the religious and community leaders of the Middle Eastern community, the Afghanistan community, the Australian Iraqi Council; the Iraqi Kaldonian Community; Arabic Welfare Association, the Pakistan Medical Association, Greek community and the Australian Medical Association Victorian branch. All these groups have signed a document (attached) endorsing our position statement on waterpipe smoking urging an adoption of our recommendation.

In New South Wales, which – like Victoria - has a strong ethnic population, all tobacco smoking has been banned from outdoor dining/café places including waterpipes as of July 6th 2015. Ethnic communities strongly back this law and want the same measures adopted in Victoria which is the only state that allows waterpipes to be smoked freely in enclosed public venues that serve food.

I look forward to hearing from you and I would be more than happy to discuss the health issues regarding waterpipes with you. I can be contacted via my mobile on 0412 539 323 or by e-mail: wally.ahmar@cmcvictoria.com.au.

Warm Regards,

Dr Walid Ahmar

BSc(Hons) PhD MBBS FRACP FCSANZ FACC

Cardiologist, President of The Australian Lebanese Medical Association

132 Sydney Road COBURG, VIC, 3058

Cc The Hon Ms Jill Hennessy Victorian Minister for Health and Ambulance Services



We the undersigned agree and fully endorse the recommendation of the June 2015 joint position statement of the Australian Lebanese Medical Association, the Heart Foundation (Victoria), the Cancer Council Victoria and Quit Victoria to amend the Tobacco Act 1987 (Vic) 'tobacco product' definition to remove the term 'main ingredient' to ensure the use of all tobacco products in enclosed workplaces is banned and all laws that apply to tobacco products also apply to waterpipe tobacco smoking.

Dr Tony Bartone

Victorian President

Australian Medical Association

Mr Samir Khafaji

President

Australian Iraqi Council - Victoria

Mr Khaliq Abdul Fazal

President

Afghan Australian Association of Victoria

Dr Afshan Mian

President

Pakistan Medical Community

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amal', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ms Amal El Khoury

Manager

Arabic Welfare

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Nassis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Arthur Nassis

Treasurer

Dr Arthur Nasis, Hellenic Medical Society Australia (Treasurer)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mickhail Yousif', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Mickhail Yousif

Iraqi Kaldonian Association of Victoria