

# Dr Walid Ammar: Father of the Modern Health Care System of Lebanon

By Nabil M Kronfol MD, DrPH

Dr Ammar exemplifies the role that public health professionals need to play in furthering the development of health and health care in their country and the Region. His intense endeavor for the development of health services in general, and primary health care and health policy in particular and his efforts in translating research and evidence into policy, programs and practice place him as a pioneer not only within Lebanon but also across the region and beyond.

His current position, namely that of Director General of the Ministry of Public Health, has brought together stakeholders to chart a vision for the welfare, rights and health care of the population in Lebanon as evidenced by the planning and development of the institutional capabilities of the Ministry and the preparation in earnest of a national strategy “Lebanon 2020”.

Dr Ammar is a model for public health professionals: he has served in Government, in academia, in regional and in international organizations; He has produced a most impressive number of publications in refereed journals as well as several books and advised students and fellow workers. He is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Health Sciences of the American University of Beirut. In our efforts to promote public health, he is an advocate of an integrated health system where enhanced preventive health services, increased health literacy, coordinated specialized health services are buttressed throughout by the informal role and care provided by the community. In brief, he is a model for health scientists in our country and region.

Dr Ammar graduated from the Medical College of the “Université Libre de Bruxelles” in 1982, received his Masters of Public Health and the “Diplôme d’Etude Approfondie (DEA)” from the Lebanese University



in 2001. He was further graduated with a PhD in Epidemiology from the “Université Victor Segalen in Bordeaux 2, France” in 2001. In addition, Dr Ammar attended several post-graduate university courses in Health Management and Public Administration from

Harvard University (1994), “Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA)” in 199 and Boston University in 1995.

Throughout his tenure as the Director General of the Ministry of public health in Lebanon (since 1993), Dr Ammar served on numerous national, regional and international organizations, boards and councils.

On the regional level, he served on the WHO Executive Board (since 2012) and was Vice Chair from 2014-2015. He chaired the WHO Standing Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (2014). Dr Ammar served as well as a member of the WHO Scientific Peer review Group on Health Systems Performance Assessment (2001-2001), of the WHO Advisory group for the Global strategy for Health Systems Research (2011-2012). In 2011, he was appointed Commissioner of the UN Commission on Information and Accountability for Women and Children’s health. More recently, Dr Ammar serves on the WHO/EMRO Technical Advisory committee.

As a researcher, Dr Ammar has initiated and supervised the major studies that have been undertaken to understand, develop and strengthen the health care system of Lebanon. The preparation of “Lebanon National Health Accounts”, and the “National Health Utilization and Expenditure Survey” in 1999 were two pivotal studies that were the cornerstone for the reform of Lebanon’s health care system. His two books “*Health System and Reform in Lebanon*” in 2003 and “*Health Beyond Politics*” in 2009 on Lebanon’s health system are essential for the understanding of health reforms under duress. In addition, Dr Ammar has an impressive list of publications. Lately, his innovative research on the performance of health systems is having profound impact in scientific circles worldwide.

Perhaps Dr Ammar’s major accomplishment is his active participation and leadership of the “*Health Sector*



*Rehabilitation Project*” that has been instrumental in the strengthening and development of Lebanon’s health care system. This Project (that was initiated by the Ministry of Health and financed by the World Bank) was the cornerstone of the reforms of the Primary health care network of health centers, the development of public hospitals, the initiation of the hospital accreditation system (the first in the region), the establishment of the Epidemiological surveillance unit, the development of performance indicators and the methodology for utilization review (in addition to many other achievements). In summary, Dr Ammar could justly be considered and named as the father of the modern health care system of Lebanon.

Finally, I have personally witnessed Dr Ammar’s contribution to debates at the national and regional levels. His eloquence, vision, perspective and manners would make every participant salute his wisdom, maturity and knowledge. I have always felt proud to be associated with Dr Ammar as a citizen of Lebanon.