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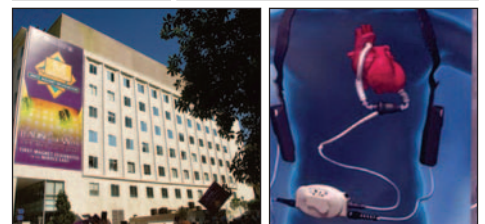
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Our Medicine was always international open to other cultures and civilizations



by Dr Abdo Jurjus

Lebanese Health Society

The era of ancient Lebanese medicine as well as the modern era was greatly influenced and to various extents by the series of civilizations and cultures that invaded Lebanon.

In the earliest history many civilization affected the life, the health and survival of the Lebanese. About 4000 BC, the Sumerians, Assyrians and Chaldeans as indicated in their script, took the snake as a medical symbol, the symbol of a noble profession, signifying rejuvenation, regeneration and the cure of illness.

Hammurabi's code, the King of Babylon has the earliest text relating to medicine and to medical ethics. Egypt had also its own God of medicine in the Pharaonic times, 2650 BC, Imhotep.

For the Phoenicians, their God of medicine was Echmoun, to whom is dedicated a medical establishment excavated in 1924, east of Sidon. Lebanon passed through all these influences.

In modern times, since the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798, the region drifted into the sphere of influence, at least medically speaking, first of Europe and later of the USA. The European influence led to the establishment of Mohammad Ali School of Medicine in 1827 in Egypt.

From this school, Dr Ibrahim Najjar graduated in 1842, the first physician in Modern Lebanon who had an official medical diploma.

The second medical school in the Middle East and the first in Lebanon was founded in Beirut by American Missionaries in 1867: the American University of Beirut.

The third medical school in the region and the second in Lebanon was also founded in Beirut by the French Jesuits in 1881: La Faculte Francaise de Medecine.

The fourth in the region was found in Damascus in 1903 and later in 1927 the fifth school in Baghdad.

However, in the second half of the 20th century, we witnessed a mushrooming of medical schools in the Middle East. There were 50 medical schools by the year 2000 and 161 by the year 2006.

Many of them either founded or affiliated to European or American Medical schools.

In Lebanon, there are now 7 medical schools functioning. In addition to the first two Lebanese medical schools, the Lebanese University, the Beirut Arab University,

The Balamand University, the Holy spirit University, and the Lebanese American University, are all very active medical schools striving to match international standards.

There about 400 new MD graduates per year from local schools for a population of 4,000,000 or 1 new local graduate for 10,000 persons. Half this number also comes from outside Lebanon leading to a total of about 600 new graduates per year.

However, it is estimated that the 2 orders of physicians (Beirut and North Lebanon) have a total number of 12,000 physicians for the 4 millions inhabitants.

- Where is medical education in Lebanon going?
- Lebanon has the best physicians in the area, for how long?
- Lebanese Medical education could be a "distinguished industry", with a high quality "product", competitive in the "international market", is this the ultimate goal?
- What do we really need to do at the policy level?

These and other questions were asked to the Deans of Medical schools in Lebanon.