

# Global Health Day

## **Social, Educational and Economic Empowerment of Underprivileged Women in Lebanon to Combat COVID-19 and Spread Cancer Prevention Awareness**

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Over a million refugees were displaced out of their country and were forced to move to Lebanon. This influx has, with no doubt, augmented the pressure on the already weakened Lebanese infrastructure. Moreover, a snowball of problems emerged in Lebanon. In 2019, the country's banking system broke down and the confounding inflation ignited mass protests. This was before the currency depreciation and the COVID-19 pandemic both of which aggravated the situation even further. And more recently, the Beirut Port's explosion severely damaged the health sector, and accordingly the picture today more than ever remains dim for healthcare in general and cancer care specifically. Importantly, the economic, financial, political, health, pandemic, and the explosion have averted the attention of cancer screening, diagnosis, or even treatment.

The need to raise awareness among people and embrace cancer patients' is crucial at this point. Moreover, People with cancer are among those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. Due to this pandemic, the price of personal protective equipment (PPE) has rocketed and now, an essential PPE, the face mask, price is no longer affordable to vulnerable communities. Accordingly, preventive measures that can reduce cancer patients' exposure to this novel coronavirus are needed.

In collaboration with the Center for Global Oncology at Northwestern University, we at AMALOUNA (meaning "Hope" in English), an educational organization affiliated with the American University of Beirut, that has been active since 2014 in cancer awareness and prevention campaigns tailored to the underserved population, aim at developing an approach to meet the needs of the refugees and cancer patients during this pandemic. Our primary goal is to invest in underprivileged women's basic skills of sewing to produce a much-coveted PPE providing one way of meeting the needs of the current market and supporting their families financially. Our secondary goal is to raise awareness about COVID-19 but also about cancer prevention and screening among those women through educational workshops. Finally, a chain where masks will be made and sold at fair prices in public places or pop-up stands around the country will hopefully provide financial continuity to this project.

The proceeds of this sale will enable us to achieve our tertiary goal of this initiative, which is to secure sanitizers and free of charge masks for underprivileged cancer patients and their families. Empowering underprivileged women and enhancing their socio-economic status to sustain themselves and their families while supporting cancer patients will increase their financial independence, post the lockdown

economic downfall, raise cancer prevention awareness, and help in preventing the spread of coronavirus in a particularly vulnerable community.

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