

EDITORIAL

OUR MEDICAL PROFESSION IS IN CRISIS *IT IS DÉJÀ VU AGAIN?*

<http://www.lebanesemedicaljournal.org/articles/69-1/editorial.pdf>

Since 2019, Lebanon has witnessed a steady increase in the net immigration of its general population. While in 2018 there was a net *decrease* of 195 % compared to 2017 (-4.493/1000 population), there was a steady *increase* of 89 % (-8.508/1000 population), 47 % (-12.523/1000 population) and a projected 32 % (-16.538/1000 population) in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively.¹

There are many reasons why Lebanese have immigrated in the past, be it religious, sectarian or to escape from the repeated civil wars, yet the majority left for economic reasons.¹ This is especially true with the October 2019 financial crisis which was compounded by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the frequent lockdowns and the near absence of governmental financial support to needy families. Over a very short period, our financial sector collapsed, and many Lebanese, including many physicians, saw their lifetime savings lost as their bank accounts were blocked.

This had a major impact on the economy, and the health sector was not immune to it. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded the stress. The health system crumbled under the stress created by the high volume of hospitalized patients, those admitted to intensive care units, and the sudden scarcity and increase in the cost of equipment and medications.

The frequent lockdowns that led to the closures of some specialty clinics (head and neck, ophthalmology and dentistry to name a few), the frequent and repeated cessation of all except emergency surgical procedures compounded the devaluation of the local currency to reduce the physician's income to a fraction of what it used to be. Certain specialties, such as plastic surgery were particularly vulnerable. In addition, the pandemic took a heavy toll on many physicians, both physically and emotionally, especially those dealing directly with COVID-19 patients, including but not limited to ICU, infectious and pulmonary specialists.

These crises affected the younger and the older generation of physicians. On one hand, the younger doctors, many of whom paid a high cost for their medical education, training and the startup of their practice, had started to build their carrier, now find themselves struggling to decide whether to wither this storm or just quit and start all over again. On the other hand, the more senior physicians saw their hard work go to waste while all their retirement funds and savings were blocked in the banks and now have to make the difficult and painful decision to leave and start all over again.

At the same time, we witnessed the teaching of medical students and the training of residents and fellows significantly affected by all the above especially the COVID-19 pandemic. The price of medical education skyrocketed beyond the reach of a large majority of them. This new generation of physicians is now worried whether they can still afford to complete their education and training and if these will remain as stellar as before and are also unsure of their future.

The Lebanese Order of Physicians (LOP) estimates that 21% of physicians have already left or asked for the necessary documents that will allow them to leave Lebanon. In addition, over 600 physicians have been infected with COVID-19 and at least ten of them have already died from the infection and its complications. Moreover, despite the devotion and commitment that these physicians have exemplified, yet we all witnessed how some of them have been mistreated by patients, their families and the media, and how some have been assaulted and injured in the process.

All the above have led to the immigration of a significant number of qualified physicians and left our medical center struggling to compensate for their loss. On one hand, the physicians who remain, do so not because they cannot leave, but because they have to stay and are not happy about it, and those who have decided to leave, do so not because they cannot stay, but because they have to and are also not happy.

Many physicians, like many of their compatriots, have witnessed these ups and downs in Lebanon over and over again, but always believed that the current predicament will be their last, only to be confronted with new and yet different crises : *It is Déjà Vu again!*

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REFERENCE : 1. Lebanon Net Migration Rate 1950-2021.

<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LBN/lebanon/net-migration#:~:text=The%20net%20migration%20rate%20for,a%20195.37%25%20decline%20from%202017.>

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