

Returning alumnus discusses advances in cancer care at WCM-Q Grand Rounds

Doha – October 10, 2016: Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) alumnus Dr. Muhamad Baljević returned to the college to discuss his research in multiple myeloma, a form of blood cancer, for the latest installment of WCM-Q's Grand Rounds.

Dr. Baljević, who graduated from WCM-Q in 2010, is now Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, home to one of the leading cancer research centers in the US.

Multiple myeloma is a cancer of plasma cells that are found in the soft, sponge-like marrow in the center of all bones. Plasma cells are a type of white blood cell that produce antibodies, which are essential for the body's immune system to function correctly. Symptoms of multiple myeloma include reduced resistance to infections, weakened bones that fracture easily, anemia leading to increased bruising and bleeding, fatigue, weight loss and kidney dysfunction. While treatments are improving all the time, the condition cannot yet be cured, with patients living for between one and 20 years after diagnosis.

Dr. Baljević said: "Multiple myeloma is the second most common hematologic malignancy behind non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and it is estimated that there will be more than 30,000 newly diagnosed cases in the USA in 2016.

"The good news is that the data show us that survival rates have improved a great deal but there is still room for more improvement. New and promising drugs are in the testing phase and I am excited to be involved in this research, which we hope will lead to improved patient outcomes."

Dr. Baljević, who is originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, was offered an Emiri scholarship in 2001 to come to Doha and finish high school at Qatar Academy, a member of Qatar Foundation. The scholarship was extended as a university academic scholarship for pre-medical and medical studies at WCM-Q, where he graduated from with honors in research. Since graduation Dr. Baljević has completed residency training in internal medicine at the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York, and fellowship training in hematology and medical oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

In addition to his fellowship training, he pursued a Master of Science degree in clinical and translational research at the university of Texas graduate school of biomedical sciences, with the aim of receiving additional training required for a role as principal investigator on cancer clinical trials, a longstanding ambition. Happily, Dr. Baljević is now looking forward to leading his first clinical trial which will investigate the efficacy of new drug combinations for treating multiple myeloma in patients who develop resistance to proteasome inhibitors. The trial is titled A Phase I/II Study of the c-Met Inhibitor Cabozantinib as a Targeted Strategy to Reverse Resistance to the Proteasome Inhibitor Carfilzomib in Refractory Multiple Myeloma.



Dr. Baljević added: “Fulfilling my dream of being involved in development of novel therapies for patients with hematologic malignancies simply would not have been possible without the generous support I received from Qatar. Returning to Doha feels like coming home and I feel tremendously grateful for the truly life-changing opportunities Qatar has granted me.”

The activity was a Category 1-Accredited Group Learning Activities as defined by the Qatar Council for Healthcare Practitioners-Accreditation Department and was approved for a maximum of 1.00 hours.

Dr. Thurayya Arayssi, Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education and Continuing Professional Development at WCM-Q, said: “We are delighted to welcome Dr. Baljević back to become the first WCM-Q graduate to speak at Grand Rounds. His experience is a great example of Qatar and WCM-Q’s commitment to realize human potential by supporting talented individuals, for the benefit of the whole community.”

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Photos Captions

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About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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