

## **QATAR-BASED JOURNALISTS WORK WITH WISH AND CARTER CENTER TO IMPROVE REPORTING ON MENTAL HEALTH**

**Doha, Qatar, September 25, 2017:** Individuals living with mental health issues continue to be misunderstood, discriminated against, and stigmatized by society. In the Middle East, a perceived lack of societal support and understanding for mentally ill people means that those dealing with mental health issues often suffer in silence or refuse treatment.

Mental illnesses, which are broadly defined as a set of behavioral patterns that cause psychological distress and consequently hinder normal daily activity, tend to be among the most underreported conditions in the world, despite being among the most prevalent. According to the World Health Organization, depression will be the second-leading cause of disability in the world by 2020. Meanwhile, a Cambridge University report conducted in 2012 found that one in 13 people globally will suffer from anxiety at some point in their lives.

Quality research on mental health is crucial in order to help improve the treatment offered to those suffering mental health problems, but the media also has a vital role to play in raising public awareness. Informed, ethical journalism can play a huge role in the dissemination of accurate information, and in shaping the attitude of the general public towards people dealing with mental health issues.

Established in 1996 by Rosalynn Carter, the former First Lady of the United States, and administered by the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism program provides expert training and support for journalists writing about mental health from around the world. In 2016, the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH), an initiative of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, partnered with the Carter Center to send four Qatar-based journalists to Atlanta to take part in the program alongside journalists from the United States, Colombia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The four inaugural fellows have now completed their yearlong fellowships, during which they created a significant body of work in both English and Arabic across a range of media. Their stories have now been added to the more than 1,500 authored by fellows since the program began.

Over the past 12 months, journalists Aney Mathew, Tarek Bazley (of Al Jazeera English), Buthaina al Janahi (of Al Arab newspaper), and Kathy Hearn have written about a range of mental health-related topics, including dementia from a care-giving perspective, an integrated

approach to autism, the progress Qatar has made in addressing mental health issues, and Qatar's vision for mental health.

Those suffering from mental illness are frequently supported by family and friends who have to deal with the toll that caregiving can take on their own lives. This issue was tackled by Aney Mathew through the work she undertook during her fellowship year.

For 'Dementia: a Caregiver's Testimony', Mathew spoke at length to Malak Zabara, who along with her mother has taken on the role of caregiver to her father. Mathew's piece describes how Zabara's life has changed since she started looking after her father, who was diagnosed with dementia some 14-years ago, detailing the emotional and physical toll the situation has had on the entire family. In 'Autism: Walking the Parental Tightrope', Mathew wrote and reported on the exhaustion and loneliness parents face when raising an autistic child.

"Caregivers are truly unsung heroes whose stories often go unrecognized or are misinterpreted or misunderstood," Mathew explained. She says she "aims to give a heartbeat" to her articles on mental health rather than to just present facts and figures on the problem in Qatar, and that she has decided, as a result of her participation in the fellowship program, to continue highlighting mental illness in her future work.

Meanwhile, Tarek Bazley, Al Jazeera English's Science and Technology editor, used his time during the fellowship to develop the media organization's international best practices for reporting mental health stories. He also commissioned and helped edit a series of focused reports on mental health in Africa.

"Through the fellowship, I believe I've been able to enrich and add depth to Al Jazeera's global coverage of this important issue," he says. "Our reporting over the past year has received considerable attention and has been widely recognized for its role in highlighting the plight of those with mental illness in the world's poorest countries."

Bazley has worked with reporters on pieces about mental health disorders in the Congo, the Ivory Coast's struggles to treat those traumatized by war; the trauma of living with HIV in South Africa, success stories of students suffering from autism in Doha, and Venezuela's spiraling mental health care crisis.

In a November 2016 episode of Al Jazeera English's 'The Stream', reporters guided by Bazley explored why Guyana has the highest suicide rate in the world. The South American country is home to 44 suicides among every 100,000 Guyanese, double the global average of 16 in 100,000 people. The show brought together journalists, psychologists, academics, and researchers to discuss the issue.

Al Arab newspaper's Buthaina Al Janahi believes the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism program offers participants a valuable opportunity to use journalism to positively influence policy-makers. "The program helps us learn to focus on how, as journalists, we can use our soft power to speak on behalf of people dealing with mental health issues and how to form a bridge between those people and society's policy-makers," she says.

Al Janahi has authored 12 columns on mental health since joining the program, in addition to writing a long-form research paper about how full-time mothers in Qatar deal with mental health problems.

Prior to joining the fellowship, Kathy Hearn, a freelance journalist, recognized that there was an imbalance in the media between coverage of physical and mental illnesses, and a gap in media coverage of how mental illness can in turn affect physical health. Her time as a Carter fellow helped her focus her efforts on trying to bridge that gap and has taught her to be mindful of the words used to describe mental illness in the media.

"I've learned about the importance of language when talking about mental illnesses, and the need for more diverse role models in the public sphere to reduce stigma," Hearn said of her time as a fellow. "In the same way we call out racism or bigotry in the newsroom, I'm able to call out discrimination against people with mental health challenges both in my personal and professional interactions, backed up by relevant science and medical data."

Hearn is in the process of editing a film for Al Jazeera English about the link between physical and mental illness that is expected to be broadcast in mid-October 2017, around International Mental Health Day. She's also writing an article on an Iraqi woman fleeing Mosul and her fight with depression, due to be published online by Al Jazeera English.

"We still have a long way to go if we are to remove the stigma around mental illnesses," Hearn says. "Just as it's important to feature a diversity of faces when creating political, business, and sports stories so people from all cultures have the chance to relate to someone who looks, talks, thinks like them, there is also a real need to feature people from the Middle East when producing stories in the media about mental health issues if we are to reduce the stigma in Arab society."

**Photo captions:**

**Image 1:** The WISH team and 2016 Qatar-based fellows, with Rosalynn Carter, former US First Lady Rosalynn Carter, at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Image 2:** Qatar-based Carter fellow, Aney Matthews, presents her work at the 2017 Carter Center gathering in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Image 3:** Qatar-based Carter fellow, Kathy Hearn, presents her work at the 2017 Carter Center gathering in Atlanta, Georgia.

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### **About the World Innovation Summit for Health:**

The World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) is a global healthcare community dedicated to capturing and disseminating the best evidence-based ideas and practices. WISH is an initiative of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) and is under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, its Chairperson.

The inaugural WISH Summit took place in Doha in 2013 and convened more than 1,000 global healthcare leaders. Through international summits and a range of ongoing initiatives, WISH is creating a global community of leading innovators in healthcare policy, research and industry.

Together, they are harnessing the power of innovation to overcome the world's most urgent healthcare challenges and inspire other stakeholders to action.

### **Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential**

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) is a non-profit organization that supports Qatar on its journey to becoming a diversified and sustainable economy. QF strives to serve the people of Qatar and beyond by providing specialized programs across its innovation-focused ecosystem of education, research and development, and community development.

QF was founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Emir, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, who shared the vision to provide Qatar with quality education. Today, QF's world-class education system offers lifelong learning opportunities to community members as young as six months through to doctoral level, enabling graduates to thrive in a global environment and contribute to the nation's development.

QF is also creating a multidisciplinary innovation hub in Qatar, where homegrown researchers are working to address local and global research and development challenges. By promoting a culture of lifelong learning and fostering social engagement through programs that embody Qatari culture, QF is committed to empowering the local community and contributing to a better world for all.



مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في الرعاية الصحية  
World Innovation Summit for Health  
An Initiative of Qatar Foundation

For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>