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*Letter to the Editor*

Dear Editor

I read with interest Dr Salem's paper entitled: "The Heart, Mind & Brain" published in the Arab Journal of Psychiatry (AJP) vol. 20, No 2, November 2009. The paper addresses an important area that received recently significant interest especially in the Western literature.

1. I found what Dr Salem statement about the individuals who underwent heart transplantation and their ability to function normally. Dr Salem added" the: The heart in such case could be considered as a medium or a physical tool serving for an underlying sophisticated integrating system that has the capacity to carry the personal identity of the individual.<sup>1</sup> I feel that considering the heart and brain as an integrated functional unit that its various ways of integrating the function may include nerve supply, chemical transmitters, hormones and electromagnetic waves. In addition some of these different ways of integrating the heart-brain function(s) may develop or maximise its function to compensate for the lost way(s) of integration as a result of the cardiac surgery e.g. nerve connections. This concept may be better explained in the light of the concept of Neuro-plasticity that has been reported with the use of atypical antipsychotics and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)<sup>2</sup>. We were taught in the medical school that dead neurons cannot come to life and their function is likely to be lost as well but nowadays the concept of Neuroplasticity is widely accepted and the psychological studies of the brain laterality indicates that one cerebral hemisphere can compensate for some of the function(s) of the other cerebral hemisphere if subjected to an insult. Other possible explanation(s) may develop with future research.

2. The brain in the heart as suggested by Armour (1994) may have its roots in our culture and other cultures as well e.g. people tend to attribute their sense of fear or anxiety associated with worrying thoughts to their heart rather than their brain<sup>3</sup>. The same applies to joy and happiness with its neurophysiological effects. Armour suggested that the heart has a complex intrinsic nervous system that is sufficiently sophisticated to qualify as a little brain. I think this could be one explanation but another explanation could be that the "heart and brain" are integrated functionally as one unit. In the many cases of post-stroke depression or personality change together with post-myocardial infarction mood disorder "depression or mania" may be evidence that supports this concept (Heart–Brain one functional unit).

3. I wish to point out that in the history of the Islamic civilization, Muslim Scholars and Physicians believed that the heart was more than a muscular organ that pumps the blood into arteries and maintains the circulation<sup>4</sup>. As we know the view that was strongly adopted by the western physicians until recently was that the heart is just a muscular organ that has no emotional, spiritual or psychological function. With the decline of the Islamic civilization and rise of the more materialistic western

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civilization this concept disappeared from the area of interest and the materialistic vision prevailed until very recently. The outcome of recent western research, both clinical and electrophysiologic, seems to agree with the previous vision adopted by Muslim scholars and physicians. Is it now time to acknowledge the importance of achievements of our ancestors and start building on this.

4. In the AJP the paper has been categorised as a liaison psychiatry paper while I respectfully feel it would have been better categorised as a review article rather than a liaison paper.

I wish to thank Dr Salem for being one of the pioneers among other Arab psychiatrists in our era that gave this area their interest. I am sure there are many psychiatrists Arab and non-Arab who have developed an interest and contributed to this area. I sincerely apologise for not recognising them & their work in my letter.

I am calling upon Dr Salem to work on establishing a special interest unit or group in the Psychiatric Department, UAE University to be the nucleus that generates more thoughts and plan future research in this field. As we agree, this area requires teamwork and not a one-person effort. Organising multidisciplinary teamwork would help us develop a strategy for the future & help develop a new generation of interested Arab researchers.

The interest in this area is likely to attract the contribution of clinicians and researchers from various disciplines including psychiatrists, psychologists, cardiologists, neurosurgeons, cardiac surgeons, neuro-radiologists and electrophysiologists.

I think it is now time to see every Psychiatric Department in the Arab world leading research and development in an area of special interest e.g. biological psychiatry, CBT, Sleep research, Dream research and spirituality & religion in relation to mental health .... Etc.

I look forwards to hear about the development of a team and enhancing the spirit of teamwork in All Departments all over the Arab World in the near future.

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أخبار الإتهاد  
إمـلان

المؤتمر الحادي عشر لاتحاد الأطباء النفسانيين العرب

خدمات الصحة النفسية في العالم العربي: تحديات المستقبل

**XIth Congress of the Arab Federation of  
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**& health services in Arab World: Challenges Mental  
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**دعوة للمشاركة**

توجه ملخصات الأبحاث إلى كل من الدكتور عبد الله عبد الرحمان رئيس الجمعية  
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## **OBITUARY**

To write about a teacher and a colleague who has passed away seems at first hand a straightforward exercise ... To write about Dr Fuad Antun who left us on the 30th. of December 2009 is another matter. Fuad was a above all an inspiration of energy and love of life for all those who knew him. I met first Fuad as a medical student in the 1970's when he had just come back to Lebanon after his training in the UK (DPM, PhD, MRC Psch). He had not only studied under giants in the field of psychiatry but had been involved already , with his mentors (such as JR Smythies), in serious research

Molecular mechanisms of storage of transmitters in synaptic terminals.

Smythies JR, Antun F, Yank G, Yorke C

Nature. 1971 May 21;231 (5299): 185-8.

Binding of tryptamine and allied compounds to nucleic acids.

Smythies JR, Antun F

Nature. 1969 Sep 6; 223 (5210): 1061-3.

We were all refreshed by his knowledge about the biochemistry of the brain and how it related to schizophrenia and other major mental disorders. Here was Fuad with his legendary beard, an elegant man and slick eyeglasses (who had considered becoming a professional pilot) mixing easily with all other specialists in the American University Hospital and that was new to us... A psychiatrist who not only felt equal but who spoke the same language we, medical students, understood quite well... Psychiatry was gaining respect... In fact, in 1974, barely 2 years after Dr Antun joined our medical school, seven medical students(out of 50) from our class decided to go into psychiatry: the highest ever number recorded and never matched again. (maybe in the world!)

When the Lebanon wars broke out and the Lebanese mental Hospital (the famous Asfourieh) closed, Fuad, like many other Lebanese traveled, only to come back in 1993 fast and since became our companion in our congresses abroad; he knew everybody everywhere and his appreciation for a good living was inspirational to many of us... His knowledge of psychopharmacology was always cutting edge and he had plenty to talk about: simply put you did not get bored with Fuad, more so you never heard him nagging, until the last minute... "What are we going to take with us?" seems to have been his motto and respect he earned from friends and others alike for what distinguished him most: his intelligence and his insatiable desire for knowledge in any field you chose... We miss you Fuad...we miss your fountainheads... we miss your neckties... we miss your eyeglasses... and your beard...

Elie Karam



21 Years

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