

## **The Calcium Metabolism and Osteoporosis Program awarded the status of Associated Research Unit March 2011**

In 2006, the new National Science and Technology Policy (STIP) was launched by the National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR), under the leadership of its director Dr Mouin Hamzeh. One of the recommendations of STIP was the creation of centers of excellence according to priorities defined by the Policy. These ARUs were designed to associate CNRS financial and human resources with leading universities in specific research domains. <http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~webbultn/v10n4/article7.htm>

The funding of ARU programs was thus initiated by the CNRS and entails supporting an integrated research project revolving around a specific research axis with a research team of at least 2-3 principal investigators from more than one university. ARUs are created annually following a call for proposals and a competitive selection process based on the outstanding scientific performance of the members of the team within the past five years, the expected outcome, the ability of researchers to attract foreign funding, and readiness to host M. Sc. and Ph. D. students and post-doctoral fellows.

There are currently three other NCSR funded ARUs at AUB that were launched in 2009. The first ARU aims at researching the quality of air in Lebanon and is implemented in cooperation with AUB and SJU, the second addresses the quality and management of water resources in Lebanon, in cooperation with the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, and the third addresses mal-nutrition and obesity in Lebanon in cooperation with the American University of Beirut, Université Saint Joseph (USJ) and Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, (USEK).

None of any of the currently NCSR funded ARUs since the program launch were based in a medical school, until the current ARU designation that is based at the Faculty of Medicine at AUB and entitled "National Core Collaborative Research Centers on Hypovitaminosis D and Metabolic Disorders". This Associated Research Unit (ARU) involves a multidisciplinary approach from three major institutions. The American University of Beirut (AUB) is the hosting institution, and the faculty members are Dr Ghada El-Hajj Fuleihan, Principal Investigator, and Drs Asma Arabi and Robert Habib. The collaborating institutions are Saint Joseph University/Hotel Dieu de France (USJ/HDF) with participation of Drs Rafic Baddoura and Georges Halaby; and Rafic Hariri University Hospital (RHUH), with the participation of Drs Samer Kabbani, Wissam Nasreddine and Mohammad Rawwas. The output activities of the ARU over three years include:

- a. Implementing a large randomized controlled trial using vitamin D in elderly subjects monitoring multiple classical (bone and muscle) and non-classical endpoints (fuel metabolism, cardiovascular, and inflammatory markers). Clinicaltrials.gov, NCT01315366, <http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT01315366?term=Vitamin+D+in+elderly+and+AUB&rank=1a>. This would provide evidence for a safe, affordable, public health intervention that will have substantial impact on major public health problems in Lebanon.
- b. Provide solid evidence for a National Vitamin D policy.
- c. Develop a National Fracture Registry and provide evidence for a national osteoporosis prevention and treatment strategy.

The ARU output activities are in harmony with the Program's mission as well as its Terms of Reference as WHO CC for Metabolic Bone Disorders, designation received in Dec 2010. The activities involve the training of at one house staff, at least one MS and one PhD student, and are co-funded by institutional funds from the Medical Practice Plan research grant at AUB, and research grant from St Joseph University; funds also obtained on a competitive basis at both institutions.