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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

- National Institutes of Health (NIH) (1R21MH095656-01)
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- Society for the Advancement of Science and Technology in the Arab World (SASTA)
- Daryl Kulok, Lila Gruber Research Foundation
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The Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative

This research and educational initiative based at Al-Quds University encompasses programs in basic neuroscience, neurogenetics, neuropsychology, clinical neurology, psychiatry, and geriatrics. The initiative has five aims:

1. Build infrastructure for neuroscience research in Palestine, based at Al-Quds University Medical School, in cooperation with regional clinics and health care centers in Jerusalem, Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jericho, Bethlehem, and Hebron.
2. Augment research training for a new generation of Palestinian medical students and doctors, in cooperation with elite institutions worldwide.
3. Support locally run research efforts to understand regionally-specific characteristics of brain disorders and mental illnesses in Palestine.
4. Expand public understanding and tolerance for those suffering from neurological and psychiatric disorders.
5. Promote life-style and behavioral choices that influence brain health and successful aging for all people.

Future Palestinian Neuroscience Institute

The Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative will be the cornerstone for a future Palestinian Neurosciences Institute at Al-Quds University, located at the Abu Dis campus. The Institute will provide advanced training and research support for Palestinian medical students, doctors, and scientists. It will establish cooperative training and research programs with other medical and scientific institutions worldwide.

The Palestinian Neuroscience Institute will also administer a broader Palestinian Neurosciences Society, open to Palestinian scientists, doctors, and students all around the world working in fields such as neurology, psychiatry, cognitive psychology, geriatrics, neuropsychology, and neuroscience. The society would apply for recognition from international organizations and seek representation at international conferences.

Current Research Questions

Current research focuses on three questions:

1. How do psychiatric and neurological disorders (especially Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's Disease, Major Depressive Disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) affect learning, memory, and decision making, and how are these cognitive abilities altered by various drug treatments?
2. What is the genetic basis for the increased risk for some neurological and psychiatric disorders among families where inter-marriage among close relatives is common?
3. How do naturally occurring variations in different genes help explain the diversity of cognitive and behavioral capabilities seen among different people?

Recent Publications


Why Neuroscience Research in Palestine?

Despite the dire state of mental health services in Palestine, this region has several unique demographic characteristics that make it an attractive place to do globally important research not otherwise conductible in the US or Europe. These characteristics include:

1. Large number of local families with rare early-onset familial forms of Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's Disease, Schizophrenia, and Depression due to multiple generations of cousin-marriages, allowing for important genetic studies to explore the biological and psychological aspects of these diseases.
2. Many individuals with psychiatric or neurological disorders who are undiagnosed or untreated and thus still medication-naive, allowing for important studies that distinguish the cognitive and emotional effects caused by medications.

Public Education: Mental Health Awareness

The stigma of mental and neurologic illnesses represents a major problem for Palestinian patients and their families, often interfering with a family's willingness to seek treatment for affected members. To raise awareness and understanding of brain disorders, we will conduct mental health education programs for public audiences, in addition to distributing Arabic-language brochures. Other programs will offer information on brain-healthy lifestyles and diets that provide guidance on avoiding dementia and memory loss.

Partners and Exchange Programs

The Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative partners with elite scientific, medical, and academic institutions worldwide to support research and training at Al-Quds University, including:

1. Rutgers University, USA.
2. Harvard University, USA.
4. Scuola Internazionale Superiore Di Studi Avanzati (SISSA), Italy.