



Outlook

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## Announcement regarding the Directorship of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

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on behalf of  
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### OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

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Dear AUB Faculty and Staff,

We are writing to announce a change in the leadership of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

After 15 years of exemplary service, Professor Ali Abu-Alfa will be stepping down from his role as Director of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), effective March 1, 2026, while continuing in his role as Chairperson of the Department of Internal Medicine. Professor Abu-Alfa joined the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as a full member and Vice Chair of the Biomedical IRB upon moving to AUB in October 2010. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed as the Director of the HRPP in January 2011.

Over the past 15 years, Professor Abu-Alfa has led the HRPP and IRB with vision and distinction. He enhanced the work of the biomedical IRB and advanced the Social and Behavioral Sciences IRB. Over the years he worked closely with and mentored IRB chairs and vice-chairs, IRB members, investigators, senior administrators and staff members. He led the development of robust governance and operational processes aligned with the highest US and international standards. He maintained AUB's active Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) in the US Department of Health and Human Services. Alignment with these standards is a part of our

long-term goal to attain accreditation by the US Association for Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP).

In parallel, Professor Abu-Alfa led efforts to ensure AUBMC's compliance with the Joint Commission International (JCI) standards for Human Research Protection (HRP), contributing to its first JCI accreditation in 2014 and subsequently in 2017, 2021, and 2024. In parallel, he ensured AUB's compliance with the national IRBs' authorization standards put forward by the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon in 2015.

Professor Abu-Alfa's efforts were instrumental in strengthening and enhancing the HRPP structure, encompassing the IRB, as well as the Compliance and Auditing, the Education and Outreach, and the Logistical and Digital Support functions. He guided strategic institutional interventions that enhanced the quality of research submissions, optimized administrative and ethical review processes, and accelerated IRB response timelines through adopting in-house automation solutions. He provided critical leadership in sustaining the HRPP/IRB operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crises, and promoted research on the ethical challenges encountered in Lebanon and the region. In parallel, he spearheaded the ongoing efforts aiming to procure a fully integrated e-IRB platform for AUB.

The HRPP and IRB as well as the entire AUB community extend their deepest gratitude to Professor Abu-Alfa for his unwavering dedication and remarkable contributions to advancing ethical research and upholding the mission of the university. We remain profoundly thankful for his legacy of leadership and service.

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Rami Mahfouz, Professor of Molecular Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, will assume the role of HRPP Director effective March 1, 2026. Professor Mahfouz has served as an active member of the Biomedical IRB since 2010, as its Vice-Chair since 2015, and as the IRB Chair since 2022. His sustained commitment to the HRPP/IRB has resulted in significant improvements in the research review processes and in solidifying the establishment of a culture upholding the highest ethical principles. He currently represents AUB on the Ministry of Public Health IRB Authorization Committee. Professor Mahfouz brings extensive expertise and leadership to this role and will play a pivotal part in advancing the ongoing efforts to secure the eIRB platform for AUB, to attain accreditation by AAHRPP, and to guide the institution's response to the rising use of artificial intelligence in research and the rapidly evolving impact on research ethics.

We would like to wish Professor Mahfouz the best of success in his new role as he takes over the directorship of the HRPP, and we count on the AUB community to continue its strong support and commitment to the HRPP/IRB under his leadership.

Sincerely,

Zaher Dawy, PhD  
Provost

Raymond Sawaya, MD  
Vice President for Medical Affairs  
Raja N. Khuri Dean, Faculty of Medicine