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PUBLICATION:	**Business Today**
DATE:	**July-2019**
COUNTRY:	**Egypt**
CIRCULATION:	**10,000**
TITLE :	**Novartis Confirmed Its Commitment To Developing Thalassemia Medications And Improving Treatment Outcomes**
PAGE:	**19**
ARTICLE TYPE:	**Agency-Generated News**
REPORTER:	**Staff Report**
AVE:	**3,000**

Novartis Confirmed Its Commitment To Developing Thalassemia Medications And Improving Treatment Outcomes

Marking the International Day of Thalassemia on 8 May, the Egyptian Thalassemia Association (ETA) held its 20th International Conference in Cairo in collaboration with Novartis Pharmaceuticals. Scientists from seven Arab and African countries, the UK and the US were invited to discuss thalassemia prevention, advanced treatments, gene therapy, as well as how to expand scientific perspectives and develop policies to improve thalassemia patient care.

Some of the leading scientists present included Dr Ali Taher, a professor of hematology and oncology at the American University of Beirut, Dr Ohene-Frempong, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr Noemi Roy, a hematologist at the Oxford University Hospitals, and Dr Shaker Mousa, a professor of pharmacology at the State University of New York and director of a US drug research center, who spoke about the role of nanotechnology in the treatment of diseases as well as his recent discovery of a treatment for sickle cell anemia.

The ETA's President, Professor Amal El Bashlawy, described thalassemia as a genetic blood disorder, noting that a child of two carriers has a 25%-chance of developing the disease and added: "Unfortunately, in Egypt, 9% of the population are carriers which is one of the highest prevalence rates in the world. Thalassemia rates in the Middle East range between 2% and 8%, with thousands of new cases diagnosed each year. Thalassemia patients need regular blood transfusions to replenish hemoglobin and red blood cell levels. However, blood transfusions can cause further complications, particularly an iron overload, which results in iron deposits in different organs such as the liver and the heart."

Novartis Oncology General Manager for Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, Dr. Sherif Amin, said: "Improving the quality of care offered to thalassemia patients is an integral part of our commitment to patients and healthcare professionals. We seek to improve treatment outcomes by rapidly adopting the latest scientific developments and offering a new approach to treatment and patient care. The Novartis vision focuses on driving scientific research to develop new medications and increase treatment options. Thanks to recent developments in hematology treatment, we now have oral iron chelation drugs, which encourage adherence to long-term treatment plans."

Amin thanked the Ministry of Health and the Health Insurance Organization for their fruitful cooperation with Novartis with the goal of providing comprehensive and high-quality treatment for thalassemia patients to help them lead normal lives, noting that joint efforts had led to the introduction of the latest iron chelation drugs.

Dr El Bashlawy, who represents thepresident of the society and is its scientific delegate in Egypthighlighted the ETA's track record and said: "The ETA was established in 1991 and joined the World Thalassemia Federation in 1992, focusing its efforts on tackling hematologic diseases, chiefly thalassemia, sickle cell disease, and hemophilia. The association board includes pediatric and hematology professors from the Kasr Al Aini faculty of medicine, along with a number of patients and their parents."

"The ETA is committed to raising awareness about the disease, offering free treatment to patients who cannot afford it, and carrying out research, as well as participating in international events to learn about the latest scientific findings in the treatment of thalassemia in particular and blood diseases in general, including the use of alternatives to blood transfusions."