

Brazil's Syrian Lebanese Hospital: 85 Years of Dedication to Health and Philanthropy

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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It all began in the 1920's. The city of São Paulo then had a population of around 580,000 inhabitants (compare this to 11 million, nowadays), coffee culture was facing one of its crises and various industries were opening their doors.

It was in this environment that on November 28, 1921, a Lebanese woman who lived in the capital of São Paulo, Adma Jafet, invited her friends to a meeting at her house, in Paraíso neighborhood.

It was not, however, just for tea. Adma, who arrived in Brazil at the age of 15, had a proposal: the construction of a hospital.

Her friends liked the idea and on that same day they donated money. A little later, the group of 27 members of the Syrian-Lebanese community, all women, had established the Syrian-Lebanese Hospital's Women's Beneficent Society.

After various beneficent tea parties, having called on their husbands and friends to participate in the task and, mainly, through much dedication, in 1965 they opened the Syrian-Lebanese hospital, currently a reference in hospital services in Brazil.

"My mother was very intelligent, she was one hundred years ahead of her times," stated Violeta Jafet, Adma's daughter and current president of the Women's Beneficent Society.

Violeta, together with a group of women who integrated the group, participated Thursday, March 16, in a ceremony honoring the late Adma and her husband, Basílio Jafet, at the Research and Education Institute at the Syrian-Lebanese Hospital.

A plate in honor of the couple was inaugurated, as was another in honor of gynecologist Pedro Camasnie, aged 92, the oldest doctor at the Hospital, and one of the members of the first clinical and administrative staff at the institution.

Both honors are part of the beginning of commemorations of the 85 years of the Society. A sticky stamp celebrating the date was also inaugurated, and it will be used on hospital correspondence, internal publications, on their intranet and on medical reports.

The stamp shows the symbol of the hospital, which is a figure of a nurse beside a radiant cross and was inspired on a logo created by Adma Jafet for the Beneficent Society. Up to November 28 this year, there will be a series of similar initiatives marking the commemoration.

Celebration

According to the superintendent of the health institution, Maurício Ceschin, at the end of this month a new version of the Hospital's web site should go on air, in Portuguese, Spanish, English and Arabic.

A book about the 85 years of the founding of the Beneficent Society will also be published. Currently, the institution's site has a version in English and Portuguese. A new memorial will also be inaugurated at the hospital's Education and Research Institute. There is currently a memorial, but it is in the hospital itself.

The Muslim Beneficent Society still runs the hospital, which currently covers an area of 54,000 square meters, is specialized in 40 areas, has 300 beds and 2,700 employees.

The institution counts on 1,200 doctors and, according to Ceschin, they treat around 5,000 patients a month. The Syrian-Lebanese Hospital is renowned mainly due to its work with high complexity patients, in areas like oncology, cardiology and neurology.

Health for All

One of the activities developed, of which the group of women who are founding members are proud, is philanthropy. The Beneficent Society runs, for example, the Social Pediatrics Ward, which treats around 800 poor children per month in the Bela Vista neighborhood, where the Hospital is installed.

It was established seven years ago. It also offers residents in the neighborhood professional training, cultural and sports activities at a building beside the hospital, as part of project "Abraça seu Bairro" (Embrace Your Neighborhood).

"We managed to make real a great ideal, helping poor children who have no means for treatment. I would do it all again," stated Violeta Jafet yesterday. The descendent of Lebanese was already ahead of the Beneficent Society when the Hospital was inaugurated, in 1965, as her mother, Adma, passed away before that, in 1956.

"The continuation of this work has my grandmother's hand and heart in it," stated Violeta's grandson, Basílio Jafet Neto, who spoke in the name of his grandmother, at the ceremony. Violeta is already 98 years old.

Apart from the work developed by the Jafet family for the development of the Hospital, the ceremony also honored the services by doctor Pedro Camasmie to the institution. Camasmie, who is also of Lebanese descent, was born in São Paulo, in 1913, and graduated in medicine at the University of São Paulo (USP).

He has been working for the hospital for 41 years and despite his old age still acts at the organization. Camasmie also helped establish the Syrian Asylum in Campos do Jordão, in the interior of the state of São Paulo.

"His life is strongly connected to what characterizes the Hospital: philanthropy," stated the director of the clinical department at the Hospital, Dário Birolini, at the ceremony.

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