



SAMS

9th National Symposium

Raising the Standard:
Defining Excellence in Modern Healthcare

— PROGRAM BOOKLET —

FEB | 13 - 15 | 2026



Dear SAMS Colleagues,

We are honored to have you join us at SAMS 9th National Symposium, themed “Raising the Standard: Defining Excellence in Modern Healthcare,” taking place from February 13th – February 15th, 2026, at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Kissimmee, FL.

Our symposium brings together medical professionals, researchers, thought leaders, and our dedicated SAMS members and supporters for an enriching experience. The program includes a comprehensive Scientific Program, offering 5.5 CME credit hours through our accrediting partner, the University of Chicago.

This year, our Scientific Program focuses on critical advancements and excellence in modern medicine, addressing key topics such as:

Healthcare Quality, Standards, & Evidence-Based Practice

Education, Workforce Development, & Collaboration

Research, Impact, & the Path Forward

Innovation & Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare

Beyond the academic sessions, we invite you to reconnect with the SAMS community through our social events. We will kick off with a Welcome Dinner on Friday evening at Maroush Shawarma & Grill. The highlight of the weekend will be our Gala Dinner on Saturday at 6:30 PM at the Gaylord Palms Resort, featuring a dedicated Children’s Gala Program for our younger guests.

For those looking for recreation, we have organized a Soccer Game & Mat Pilates option on Saturday afternoon, as well as a Family Picnic on Sunday to conclude our gathering. Additionally, attendees can take advantage of exclusive discounted rates for Walt Disney World® Resort.

We hope this symposium serves as a venue for professional growth, and a refocusing of our collective mission to support our members and strengthen our humanitarian impact in Syria and beyond.

Thank you for your dedication to SAMS and the communities we serve. We look forward to a wonderful weekend in Florida!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aref Rifai', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Sincerely,

Aref Rifai, MD

President, Syrian American Medical Society

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday February 13th, 2026:

Onsite Check-in: 4:30PM – 6:30PM
Welcome Dinner: 7:30PM – 10:00PM

Saturday February 14th, 2026:

Breakfast: 7:30AM – 8:30AM
Scientific Program Sessions*: 8:30AM – 12:30PM
Lunch Break: 12:30PM – 1:30PM
Mat Pilates & Social: 1:00PM – 3:00PM
Soccer Tournament: 3:00PM – 5:00PM
Gala Dinner: 6:00PM – 11:00PM
Children's Gala Program: 6:00PM – 11:00PM

Sunday February 15th, 2026:

Breakfast: 8:00AM – 9:00AM
Scientific Program Sessions*: 9:00AM – 11:00AM
General Body Meeting: 11:00AM – 12:30PM
On the Lawn Afternoon: 1:00PM – 4:00PM

**Accredited continuing education learning*

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Conference Co-Chairs:

Muhammad AlSayid, MD, *SAMS BOD, Member*
Tarek Jazaerly, MD, *SAMS BOD, Member*

Scientific Co-Chairs:

Ihsan Mamoun, MD, MBA, *Member*
Fayez Safadi, PhD, *Member*

Planning Committee:

Ihab Herraka, MD, *Member*
Muhammad Fuad Azrak, MD, *Member*
David Lillie, *SAMS Executive Director*
Safaa Aladham, *Director of Finance*
Ala'a El-Shaar, *Scientific Program Coordinator*
Salam Abdulrazzak, *Society Coordinator*
Zeina Fakhri, *Society Media Manager*

DAY 1

Saturday February 14th, 2026

BREAKFAST

7:30AM - 8:30AM

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

Introduction and Welcome by Scientific Co-Chairs

8:30AM - 9:00AM

Session 1: Healthcare Quality, Standards & Evidence-Based Practice

9:00AM - 10:30AM

Establishing Quality Care Metrics and Standards Across SAMS Centers in Syria

Sawsan Rashdan, MD

Closing the Gap: Using GRADE-ADOLOPMENT to Transform Global Research into Local Care

Osama Altayar, MD, MSBMI

Translating Quality Metrics into Actionable Clinical Change

Fayez Safadi, PhD

Q&A and Panel Discussion

COFFEE BREAK

10:30AM - 11:00AM

Session 2: Education, Workforce Development, & Collaboration

11:00AM - 12:30PM

Implementation of Active Learning in Healthcare Education

Khaled Muhsen Hasan, MD, MS, PhD

Strategic Academic-Healthcare Collaborations: Building Pathways to Strengthen the Allied Health Workforce

Mohamad Mukhles Tlass, Ed.D., MBA, CPhT, PhTR

Making the Right Call: How Critical Thinking Reduces Diagnostic Errors

Nabil Alzaeim, MBBCH, MSc

Q&A and Panel Discussion

LUNCH

12:30PM - 1:00PM

GALA DINNER

6:00PM - 11:00PM

DAY 2

Sunday February 15th, 2026

BREAKFAST

8:00AM - 9:00AM

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

Session 3: Research, Impact & the Path Forward

9:00AM - 10:00AM

From Discovery to Impact: SAMS Research Committee Year in Review

Chighaf Bakour, MD, PhD

Team-Based Care as the Foundation of Quality and Excellence

Ihsan Mamoun, MD, MBA

Q&A and Panel Discussion

Session 4: Innovation & Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare

10:00AM - 11:00AM

AI Without Borders: Expanding Diagnostic Power in Low-Resource Settings

Basem Jaber, MD

Beyond Quality Control: How AI Is Redefining Trust in Lab Data and Protecting Physicians' Decisions

Abdul Hamid Halabi, MS, MBA

Q&A and Panel Discussion

COFFEE BREAK

11:00AM - 11:30AM

GENERAL BODY MEETING:

The Standard We Set

11:00AM - 12:30PM

Led by SAMS Leadership

SPEAKERS

Sawsan Rashdan, MD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine and the Quality and Safety Officer for the Division of Hematology and Oncology at UT Southwestern Medical Center. She specializes in the treatment of thoracic malignancies.

Dr. Rashdan earned her medical degree from the Faculty of Medicine at Damascus University in Syria. She also serves on the Foundation Board of Directors of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) and is the past Chair of its Oncology Committee.

Osama Altayar, MD, MSBMI is an Associate Professor of Medicine at the Division of Gastroenterology. Dr. Altayar is currently the chair of the American Gastroenterological Association Institute Clinical Guidelines Committee and a member of the GRADE network. In addition to his work as a gastroenterologist, he has been working as a research and guideline methodologist since 2013 and participated in and/or led the development of guidelines for the American Urological Association, the Endocrine Society, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the American Gastroenterological Association. Dr. Altayar has also lectured and facilitated numerous U.S. GRADE Network guidelines development workshops.

Fayez Safadi, PhD was born in Damascus to Syrian parents and completed his early education in Saudi Arabia. He began his academic training in biochemistry at the University of Damascus before continuing his studies in the United Kingdom, where he earned a BSc (Honors) in Biochemistry, Physiology, and Nutrition, followed by an MPhil and PhD in Cancer and Genetics from the University of Southampton. His doctoral research focused on the therapeutic role of vitamin D in breast cancer, and he later completed a research fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania in endocrinology and genetics, studying skeletal physiology and pathology.

Dr. Safadi held his first faculty appointment at Temple University School of Medicine, where he spent nearly 13 years developing a federally and privately funded research program in bone diseases. He currently serves as Professor of Medicine and Director of the Musculoskeletal Research Program at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), is an Ohio Research Scholar, and a Senior Scientist at Akron Children's Hospital. Dr. Safadi has authored over 100 scientific publications, holds multiple patents, and is the founder and Chief Scientific Officer of GPN Therapeutics, Inc., a biotechnology startup focused on bone regeneration. He is an internationally recognized researcher, educator, and mentor with extensive leadership experience in academic medicine and global scientific collaboration.

SPEAKERS

Khaled Muhsen Hasan, MD, MS, PhD is a Professor of Clinical Pharmacology and Clinical Research at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) and serves as Acting Director of Student Experience and Faculty Advisor to the UMES Physician Assistant Student Society. Trained in medicine and cardiovascular pharmacology (MD, MS, MPhil, PhD—University of London), he has more than two decades of experience teaching across medical, pharmacy, physical therapy, and physician assistant programs. Dr. Hasan is nationally recognized for integrating active and retrieval-based learning, case-based instruction, and educational innovation to enhance clinical reasoning, student engagement, and equity in health professions education. His research focuses on cannabis and opioid use, educational outcomes, and curriculum design, and he remains actively involved in mentoring student scholarship, interprofessional education, and professional service.

Mohamad Mukhles Tlass, EdD, MBA, CPHT, PhTR is currently serving as Vice President of Instruction and Student Services at Houston City College (formerly known as Houston Community College), Coleman College for Health Sciences. Before the Vice President Role, Dr. Tlass was the Director of the Workforce Quality and Development, Curriculum and Learning Initiatives Department. Before this role, Dr. Tlass served as Assistant Dean of Health Sciences, Therapeutic Departments at Tarrant County College. Dr. Tlass oversaw seven allied healthcare programs, including Anesthesia Technology, Central Sterile Processing, Health Information Technology, Medical Assistant, Ophthalmic Technician, Physical Therapy Assistant, Surgical Technology, and two continuing education programs: Pharmacy Technician and Medical Coder. Dr. Tlass holds an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership from the American College of Education (2024). Additionally, he holds a Master's in Pharmacy from the University of Medicine Sofia in Bulgaria (1999) and a Master's in Business Administration from Texas Woman's University (2014). He is also a certified and registered pharmacy technician. In addition, Dr. Tlass is a certified aseptic techniques & sterile product preparation instructor from Austin Community College.

Nabil Alzaeim, MBBCH, MSc is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine at The Ohio State University, and an academic hospitalist with experience in internal and hospital medicine. He serves as Program Co-Director of the SAMS Internal Medicine Residency Program at Al-Ziraa Hospital in Syria and as Vice Chair of the SAMS Ohio Board. He is deeply committed to graduate medical education, mentoring medical students and residents with a strong emphasis on clinical reasoning, professionalism, and physician development.

SPEAKERS

Chighaf Bakour, MD, PhD is an associate professor of epidemiology at the college of public health. She teaches epidemiology courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and mentors graduate students in the epidemiology concentrations, in addition to serving as the faculty lead for the MPH and MSPH in epidemiology. She is dedicated to improving the content and delivery of epidemiology courses and in providing online and on-campus students with the best possible experience in the program. Dr. Bakour obtained her PhD in public health with a concentration in epidemiology from USF COPH, her MPH from Independence University, and her MD from Damascus University in Syria, where she practiced medicine for few years before moving to the United States. Her medical training, combined with her epidemiological and quantitative training, inform her research focus on child and adolescent health and the impact of early life exposures on future health outcomes. Specifically, she studies adverse childhood experiences, screen use, and sleep duration and quality, and their effect on mental health and the risk and progression of chronic diseases. Additionally, Dr. Bakour has a passion for data analysis and application of epidemiology methods in the investigation of a variety of health-related problems.

Ihsan Mamoun, MD, MBA is a pediatric and neuroradiologist who practiced at Cleveland Clinic beginning in 2013, where he completed both his residency and fellowship training. He holds Certificates of Added Qualification (CAQ) in Pediatric Radiology and Neuroradiology from the American Board of Radiology, is board certified in Imaging Informatics, and earned his MBA in 2016. Dr. Mamoun is actively involved in resident and fellow education and has participated in pediatric and neuroimaging clinical rounds and tumor boards at Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital.

A member of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) since 2010, Dr. Mamoun has served in multiple leadership roles, including Vice President of SAMS from 2020 to 2022 and as a former foundation board member. He has contributed extensively to humanitarian medical relief efforts, emphasizing the role of radiology in crisis settings through educational initiatives and continued teleradiology support for facilities inside Syria. Dr. Mamoun has presented at SAMS national and international conferences and other professional society meetings and currently practices in Tampa, Florida.

SPEAKERS

Basem Jaber, MD is an Abdominal Imaging and Imaging Informatics Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. He earned his medical degree from Damascus University and completed his radiology residency in 2025. His clinical work focuses on advanced abdominal imaging alongside active involvement in imaging informatics and academic research.

Dr. Jaber has also been engaged in global health, leading workshops in Syria to improve breast cancer screening and diagnosis using low-cost simulation models.

Abdul Hamid Halabi, MS, MBA is Founder and CEO of Clinlab.AI, a Technology company delivering AI powered Laboratories as a Service to Physician Offices in the Community. These labs empower physicians to have all the data they need on their patients at their fingertips while providing them a supplemental revenue stream to keep the mission of delivering great access to care in the community going.

Prior to that Abdul headed up Translational Artificial Intelligence at Tempus Labs, a leader in AI & Precision Medicine. Abdul drove the strategy for digital and AI solutions across oncology, urology, and pathology. He built and launched Tempus Edge, a platform enabling Actionable AI applications to pathology supporting Precision Medicine initiatives for Patients. In addition, Abdul Launched Tempus LENS, data and AI precision medicine platform enabling scalable access to genotypic and phenotypic data and rapid insight for the life science community.

Before that Abdul Hamid Halabi led NVIDIA's healthcare startup driving business growth and innovation into medicine and medical devices. He has been at the forefront of advanced technologies in AI and HPC for several decades, working with top global thought leaders and world-class organizations, such as the American College of Radiology to bring AI to Healthcare. Abdul launched NVIDIA's Health platform, Clara to reach thousands of developers and deployment sites. He also grew NVIDIA's healthcare industry presence to a healthy 9-figure and accelerating business. Abdul pioneered key concepts of intelligent medical devices and hospitals of the future. Prior to his current role, Abdul was a leader within NVIDIA's engineering organization where he led the Hardware Design effort of the mobile processor powering NVIDIA's DRIVE platform.

UPCOMING EVENT!

SAVE THE DATE

SAMS 24TH
INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE

JUNE 27 - 29, 2026

ALEPPO, SYRIA



society.sams-usa.net



CME Information

SAMS 9th National Symposium - Raising the Standard: Defining Excellence in Modern Healthcare

February 14-15, 2026

DESCRIPTION

From February 14-15, 2026, the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) will host its 9th National Symposium at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center. This pivotal event gathers physicians, allied health professionals, students, and humanitarians from across the nation to foster collaboration, innovation, and leadership in healthcare.

Centered around the theme “Raising the Standard: Defining Excellence in Modern Healthcare,” the symposium will feature dynamic presentations, panel discussions, and lectures from renowned academics, humanitarian experts, and leaders of the Syrian-American healthcare community. Participants will address crucial challenges facing modern medicine: bridging the gap between research and daily practice, overcoming fragmented systems, and driving equitable improvements to patient outcomes.

Through targeted sessions focused on quality improvement, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the translation of innovation, including the promise of digital health and artificial intelligence, this activity aims to transform excellence in healthcare from aspiration to routine reality.

Despite advances in medical knowledge and technology, many professionals lack adequate training or support for team-based care and system-wide implementation. Innovations in AI, digital health, and research are often slow to impact real-world outcomes, hindered by health inequities, resource limitations, and workforce burnout. The resulting practice gap is reflected in variable care quality and missed opportunities for improvement.

To address these gaps, learners need not only theoretical understanding but also practical strategies that reliably integrate evidence, teamwork, and technology into daily practice. This activity will provide tools for effective implementation, enhance team collaboration, and accelerate the adoption of innovation to standardize and raise the quality of care.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this educational activity, participants will be able to:

- Design actionable implementation plans that translate quality metrics and AI-generated insights into streamlined clinical workflows;
- Analyze and compare diagnostic decision-making, leveraging both enhanced critical thinking and AI-supported approaches to reduce diagnostic errors;
- Formulate multidisciplinary, team-based care strategies that effectively integrate physicians, allied health professionals, and educators for improved care quality, safety, and coordination in a variety of clinical settings;
- Critique current quality metrics and standards across different health environments and assess their applicability to settings with variable resources and constraints.

Target Audience

The symposium is intended for physicians, allied health professionals, healthcare students, educators, administrators, humanitarians, and members of the Syrian-American medical community dedicated to advancing excellence in modern healthcare.

ACCREDITATION AND CREDIT DESIGNATION

Physician Credit

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the joint providership of the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine and The Syrian American Medical Society. The University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine is accredited by the ACCME to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

The University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine designates this live activity for a maximum of 5.50 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™*. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Other Participant Credit

Other participants will receive a Certificate of Participation. For information on the applicability and acceptance of Certificates of Participation for educational activities certified for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* from organizations accredited by the ACCME, please consult your professional licensing board.

EDUCATIONAL GRANTS/COMMERCIAL SUPPORT

This CME-certified activity has not requested or received any support or funding from commercial interests. This includes, but is not limited to, pharmaceutical companies and medical device manufacturers.

DISCLOSURE DECLARATIONS

Because the content of this course is not related to products or business lines of any ACCME-defined commercial interest, the collection of financial disclosures is unnecessary for the course, and program material. Therefore, all presenters/presentations have *No relevant financial relationships to disclose.*

COURSE DIRECTORS

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Ihab Herraka, MD
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Aref Rifai, MD
Ruba Azzam, MD

The staff of the Center for Continuing Medical Education and SAMS have no relevant financial relationships with ineligible companies to disclose.

All the relevant financial relationships listed for these individuals have been mitigated.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this activity are those of the individual speaker. It should not be inferred or assumed that they are expressing the views of any pharmaceutical or product/device manufacturer, provider of commercial services, or The University of Chicago. The drug selection and dosage information presented in this activity are believed to be accurate. However, participants are urged to consult the full prescribing information on any agent(s) presented in this activity for recommended dosage, indications, contraindications, warnings, precautions, and adverse effects before prescribing any medication. This is particularly important when a drug is new or infrequently prescribed. Copyright © 2026 University of Chicago. All rights reserved including translation into other languages. No part of this activity may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from The University of Chicago Center for Continuing Medical Education.

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