



American Healthcare Professionals and Friends for Medicine in Israel

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Dr. Yasmin Ghantous, DMD, is now head and neck above most of the rest.

Ghantous recently completed an APF 2017- 2018 Research Fellowship in head and neck oncology at Johns Hopkins University. She is now one of the few in Israel both skilled in oral and maxillofacial surgery and formally trained to research the area's cancers.

"There just aren't many of us out there," she says.

The 32-year-old Haifa native is completing her final year of residency in maxillofacial surgery at Baruch Padeh Poriya Medical Center's Bar-Ilan campus in Tel Aviv, where she has been specializing in head and neck cancer.

But now, because of her work at Hopkins, her home hospital will be giving her one or two days of dedicated research time for oncology. "This is very exciting. I'm very lucky; I will be able to continue research from Hopkins and to work in other areas as well.

"I'm planning research in oral cancer, every aspect of it -- diagnostic factors, genetic factors and more. It's a very advancing field.

"I will truly begin working as a physician/scientist."

Her mentor at Padeh Poriya has been Dr. Imad Abu El-Naaj, head of the medical center's oral and cranio-maxillofacial surgery department. "He is my role model," she says. I see how he talks to patients; he explains things very well in their language and is so modest.

"Surgeons, the first thing they want to do is cut. He know when NOT to cut. Dr. El-Naaj has a lot of experience and knows how and when to make the right decisions.

"He is an excellent teacher as well. He truly knows how to convey his subject matter to students."

At the Baltimore medical school Dr. David Sidransky, director of head and neck cancer research, became Ghantous's mentor.

"He's known world-wide and is a big reason why Johns Hopkins was my first choice for a fellowship.

"His lab, one of the best in the entire world, has published a lot in very prestigious journals, and they have wonderful equipment and very modern research techniques that aren't widely available in Israel.

"In Israel we have a lot of labs, but many aren't as modern as those in the United States."

With Sidransky's team Ghantous worked on three projects:

- Using biopsy fluid from the parotid glands (in the cheek) to diagnose tumors and diseases of the salivary glands.
- Genetics and pharyngeal cancer.
- Finding a pair of genes that can predict lymph node metastasis in oral squamous cell carcinoma. They found six pairs. "This is really excellent; it's an area that has not been studied before."

From her fellowship work Ghantous has already published one paper (on genetic markers in salivary gland tumors) and expects three more.

Prior to Hopkins she had published several journal articles and presented research abroad.

Ghantous chose her field in high school after deciding on medicine and appraising all the options. "It seems like I always knew that I was going to do this," she says. "Oral and maxillofacial surgery is a

very diverse field. You can do minor and major surgery. You can do head and neck oncology and plastic surgery.”

She received a Bachelor of Science from the Faculty of Dental Medicine at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a Master of Science from Technion (for which she studied the role of the human papilloma virus in the etiology (cause) and prognosis of oral squamous cell carcinoma) and a Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry from Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Unlike in the U.S., in Israel one needs an undergraduate degree and a dental medicine degree and residency to become a maxillofacial surgeon.

Ghantous, however, will continue schooling at Bar Ilan University (located in Ramat Gan in the Tel Aviv district) in a special medical school program after finishing her residency. It’s one that allows a “crossover” from DMD to MD in fewer years than the physician’s degree typically takes. Padeh Poriya is affiliated with Bar Ilan.

Her husband, Dr. Zaher Bahouth, also 32, is a resident at Bnai Zion Medical Center in Haifa,

specializing in bladder cancer. He, too, was an oncology research fellow at Hopkins. They traveled to the U.S. from Sh’fa Amir (near Haifa) with their daughter Nisan, five years old.

Mom’s Baltimore hours were Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. And she really saw the difference her schedule made on family life. “It was not the usual clinic hours. In Israel we don’t get to spend a lot of time together, but in the U.S. we did and it was really good for all of us.”

Ghantous says her fellowship year has really “lifted” her career. “It just opens your mind to all sorts of research ideas. I’m going to use everything I’ve learned in the U.S. now that I’ve returned. Not only has it enriched my career, it will enrich the hospital where I work. And things are changing already.”

Padeh Poriya will be ordering some new equipment and hospital personnel are having meetings with Ghantous about her proposed work. “We need equipment and we need people, but we will start.

“I want to do the kind of high level research here that I was doing at Johns Hopkins because now that I know a lot about it, I can do it.”

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