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The Global Institute for Health and Human Rights (GIHHR) was founded by physicians and human rights activists Arash and Kamiar Alaei in 2012, and certified by the State University of New York at Albany one year later. Since its creation, the Institute has been instrumental in helping to reconstruct the concept of health as a human right, and to help bridge the gap between these two fields. While health is thought to be an important aspect of people’s lives, it is not globally viewed as a fundamental human right. This idea is what the GIHHR seeks to alter. The Alaei brothers have helped people from many countries around the world through their extensive work on HIV/AIDS care and prevention, education policies and much more. They are able to accomplish this by cultivating connections with individuals from government and non-government organizations all over the globe. The mission of the GIHHR is to provide people with access to what the Institute believes is an essential human right, through research, grant writing, and advocacy work at both a national and international level. In doing so, the Institute can ensure that these crucial steps forward positively affect the lives of countless more.

Mission Statement

The Global Institute for Health and Human Rights aims to facilitate a deeper understanding of the intersection between health and human rights, with concentration on reproductive health, maternal and child care, HIV/AIDS prevention and harm reduction to develop innovative solutions to contemporary challenges in this arena through research, education, policy, advocacy and development.
In mid-November of 2016, Kamiar Alaei travelled to several universities throughout China and Taiwan in order to give a lecture to students about research that he, along with the GIHHR, had conducted on HIV/AIDS.

Alaei was personally invited by leaders in these universities to present the lecture, A human right based approach to Health for people who inject drugs, to their students. The presentation was given in order to inform and educate students about the many struggles faced by people living with HIV and people who inject drugs.

The universities Alaei was invited to included Hong Kong University, Macau University, the National Taiwan University, National Normal Taiwan University, South China University of Technology and Wuyi University and Guangdong University. In addition to these schools, the majors of the students who attended the lecture ranged greatly, and included criminal justice, to public health, to pre-law. The variation in university and major is important to ensure that this issue is recognized by everyone, and that it can also affect anyone.

The PowerPoint presentation highlighted the importance of preventing those living with HIV/AIDS from being stigmatized in society, as well as providing aid to people who inject drugs. In addition to showing the importance of recognizing that these are human rights problems, the lecture focused on different ways that this issue has and is currently being addressed throughout the world.

It is just as, if not more important to address the social stigmas and prejudice connected to these issues as it is to improve medical and technological analysis, Alaei said in his presentation.

In addition to educating the students from these universities about an important subject, the trip also provided and improved global relations between the GIHHR and other education and research facilities. These connections will be continuously used in the effort to make known the issues connecting health and human rights.
Turkey and Tajikistan

The GIHHR and Şişli Municipality (a district located in Istanbul, Turkey) signed a cooperation agreement set to last through the next two years and seeks to battle HIV through further development of the region's health care facilities.

This achievement was the result of a trip made by Arash Alaei to Istanbul in early January, in order to lead a lecture on how to facilitate a health center focused on HIV VCT (Volunteer Counseling and Testing).

“We developed a training workshop to invite Şişli’s Health Center to offer HIV testing and services to society and key populations,” said Alaei. The main point, he added, was on voluntary counseling, and several health care workers from various universities, NGOs and other facilities were invited to addend.

The goal of the agreement is to provide better, more comprehensive care to people living with HIV and AIDS, particularly those in the LGBT community. This will be made possible by the collaborative work between the GIHHR and Şişli Municipality to establish a HIV VCT Health Clinic.

A signing ceremony was held in Şişli on January 9, 2017, to commemorate the agreement. The ceremony was attended by Dr. Alaei, the mayor of the Şişli district, Hayri İnönü and other professionals in the field of health care.

In addition to creating a HIV clinic, the GIHHR will work with the Volunteer Test Counseling Center, which is a part of the Şişli Municipality Health Affairs Department. This Center provides tests, counseling, and examinations for patients anonymously, with a specific focus on the LGBT community.

There are millions of people around the world currently living with HIV, with more patients each year. While Turkey does not have the largest number of people living with HIV and AIDS, the virus is spreading around the region faster than most other nations.
The Volunteer Counseling Center is crucial to stop this growing cycle and provide people with the ability to discover and treat the disease.

One of the more vital aspects of the health clinic is that it allows its patients to remain anonymous. There remains a stigma against people who are living with HIV, that they did something wrong. Anonymity takes away that fear of judgement, and encourages patients to receive treatment, rather than cover up their illness.

There are several other aspects regarding HIV treatment that was brought up during the signing ceremony, including the “90-90-90 target.” The fundamentals of this plan is that, by the year 2020, 90 percent of people living with HIV will have been diagnosed, and 90 percent of that population will be receiving treatment for the virus. Furthermore, the 90 percent of those receiving this antiretroviral treatment will have viral suppression.

While an ambitious plan, it is one that requires global cooperation, which is exactly what the GIHHR and Şişli Municipality hope to accomplish with their agreement. It is the next step in providing health care to people in Turkey, and removing the stigma that is so often felt towards people living with HIV. More importantly, it provides a facility for people to receive that care that they need.

Alaei has said that this volunteer work is essential to establishing a bond between Turkey and the rest of the world with regard to knowledge about HIV, and providing the fundamental care to people living with HIV.

In addition to Turkey, Alaei also traveled to Tajikistan, upon a personal invitation by the country’s Minister of Health. He met with the Minister of Health along with his deputies in order to help them write a grant proposal. Furthermore, the Minister of Health asked the GIHHR to help train the region’s health professionals. The Institute is currently working on the proposal and Alaei plans on returning to Tajikistan soon to further progress.
Syria - Online Education for Students in Conflict

On February 1st, the Global Institute for Health and Human Rights (GIHHR) and Global Multilingual Online College (GMOC), housed at the State University of New York at Albany, held an on-campus meeting with faculty, experts, and scholars from Yale University, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, and University of South Carolina to develop a Collaboration for Health Education in Conflict (CHEC).

The ongoing conflict in Syria has displaced roughly 12 million people from their homes, an estimated 200,000 of whom are qualified for higher education, according to the World Bank and Institute of International Education. Furthermore, Medecins Sans Frontieres estimated that 2,500 doctors worked in Aleppo before the conflict began, yet less than 100 remain and are still practicing.

To assist students displaced by conflict, Drs. Arash and Kamiar Alaei, Co-Founding Directors of GIHHR and GMOC, have spent two years developing the Online Education for Students in Conflict (OESC) program, focused on Syrian medical students. OESC provides online, free of charge academic health science courses and Intensive English Language Program (IELP) courses to over 500 Syrian medical students inside Syria. This program works in collaboration with Free Aleppo University, which began as an underground offshoot of the University of Aleppo in 2016 so displaced Syrian medical students could continue their education regardless of their physical location.

In the pilot phase, delivered from summer to fall 2016, the OESC program offered three academic science courses, and two levels of IELP. This program has been made possible due to the countless hours and contributions of many volunteers, interns, and faculty who are dedicated to help displaced students achieve their potential.

However, the need of displaced students is far too great for any one institution or university to address. This initiative is now expanding beyond the GIHHR and GMOC, by including faculty and experts from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Yale University and USC in a proposed CHEC. With the aim of supporting the education of displaced future healthcare providers, the partners reviewed outcomes of the pilot phase and will use lessons learned from this phase to further develop this program and expand it in other conflict zones.
The meeting began with a graduation ceremony for the first cohort of displaced Syrian medical students and faculty to pass the online IELP under the guidance of Krassi Rangelova, a UAlbany IELP instructor. Thirty-one students graduated and were awarded certificates from UAlbany IELP during the online ceremony. By providing IELP courses, students will increase their English language proficiency so they can adequately network on a global scale and take courses from other universities.

These online courses had a 26 percent dropout rate compared the average rate of 50 percent, according to Rangelova, “this is an impressive percentage especially considering the circumstances,” she said, referring to the constant distractions and background noises of sirens and babies crying that most students experienced while learning.

Also featured at the meeting was a demo of the “Shaban” app, a smartphone application developed by the GIHHR-GMOC in collaboration with UAlbany’s computer science department to better deliver online education to the target group. The Shaban app is user-friendly to first time students in online education programs, and functions in conditions, such as infrequent internet connection, related to displacement.

Reports on the success of the academic courses, as well as challenges related to delivery, technology, and the unique needs of displaced students in conflict zones were presented. A major topic of conversation was how to improve the OESC pilot and expand it to other groups of displaced students in conflict zones. Solutions were centered on innovation in technology, curriculum development and teaching methods, integration of health science in English language programs, and challenges with accreditation for students pursuing education in displacement. Additionally, the group would like to hire volunteers and professionals in border countries to improve efficiency and cultural competence in delivery, and improve the accreditation process.

Due to being enrolled in higher education during conflict, students face issues in receiving accredited degrees. CHEC seeks to provide students who complete the courses with an official transcript so that they receive academic credit from UAlbany or other accredited universities to continue their education.

In addition to collaboration with partners in CHEC, a GIHHR-GMOC call for volunteers has recruited 59 faculty members from 20 countries, including the U.S., who have volunteered to teach health science courses pro-bono to displaced Syrian students.
After years of hard work and global collaboration, the GIHHR has made significant advancements on the topic of women’s health in Iraq, with the official launch a women’s health center in Kurdistan.

This had been a goal of the Institute since 2015, and began with the Alaei brothers’ proposal to establish several workshops between the State University of New York at Albany and Hawler Medical University in Erbil City, Iraq. These workshops were instrumental in cultivating collaboration between those at the GIHHR and faculty in Iraq, which led to the eventual construction of a women’s health center.

The first of these workshops was hosted at the University at Albany in mid-November of 2015, with the GIHHR inviting several Iraqi scholars to attend various trainings and panels over the course of five days. These presentations covered topics such as female genital mutilation (FGM), reproductive health, violence against women and capacity building for women’s rights in Kurdistan. Due to the overwhelmingly positive feedback from both sides, it was decided that there would be another workshop between the two universities the following year. This time, the venue was decided to be Hawler Medical University. So, in early October of 2016, the Alaei brothers, along with several other physicians and health professionals, made the journey to Iraq to continue the two countries teamwork, and to further address women’s rights in Kurdistan. The trainings given at Hawler focused on substance use, HIV/AIDS, environmental factors with regard to diseases, and barriers for research in Kurdistan, among other topics. These forums were held to point out the factors preventing people from getting the care that they need. Whether it be stigma with the disease, lack of funding, or lack of knowledge, a multitude of possibilities were posed.
Similar to the first workshop, the second was hailed as a success according to the faculty who attended the meetings. In addition to holding presentations on these various issues, these scholars also met with a number of global organizations in order to brainstorm possible solutions to the problems posed in the panels. These organizations were the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency, and The World Health Organization (WHO). Through this cooperation, the GIHHR was able to build and develop global partnerships, which enabled the Institute to call for the launch of a women’s health center in Iraq.

Neither the workshops nor the center would have been possible without funding. This was provided by IREX, a nonprofit organization that offers support for individuals and institutions alike wishing to better their community through education and development. With the grant accepted by IREX, the GIHHR was able to fund the two meetings between the health professionals in the U.S. and Iraq and establish a women’s center.

The establishment of the health center has been a great step towards improving women’s rights in Iraq, with the facility being run by both full time employees, as well as volunteers specifically trained to work at a health clinic. The GIHHR, however, wants to expand its programs, so it has focused on developing a needs assessment for patients of the clinic. Kamiar Alaei has been working with multiple other partners to create a questionnaire that these women can answer about various aspects of their lives. “By identifying the gaps, we will have more details, more comprehensive service to women,” Alaei said.

In addition to the survey, the GIHHR would like to make in Erbil include programs focusing on mental health and addiction, epidemiology and statistics training. There is also discussion of a conference hosted by Hawler Medical University next year in connection with OBGYN society next year. This collaboration will help the health center receive more comprehensive care.

Further steps by the GIHHR include developing a project set to lower maternal mortality and morbidity in Erbil, though a community-based program. The Institute has recently submitted a grant and it waiting for its approval, so that even more progress can be made in providing care to women in Iraq.
Senior Features

Natalie Turner

Natalie is a Social Welfare student and has been working at the GIHHR since January 2015. She first started working here after taking Arash and Kamiar’s course “Health and Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach.” She started off assisting Arash to develop a substance abuse hotline in Turkey. After that, she began writing multiple grants that promote increased access to education for international students, professionals, and refugees. One proposal that received funding in particular increased access to educational programs by adapting the Advanced Graduate Certificate in International Health a Human Rights into a program that could be completed entirely online. She also facilitated the collaboration and visit of multiple scholars from Iraq. These scholars were seeking international collaboration with the University at Albany to help with the development of a Women’s Right to Health Center in Iraq. The Center has since been completed. Natalie has also started researching infectious diseases. In her time here, Natalie has learned a lot on grant writing, conducting research, and facilitating international collaboration. After graduating Natalie will be working to obtain her Master’s in Social Work and will continue promoting health as a human right.

Vince LaMantia

Vince is a Pre-med student in the Honors College at UAlbany. Along with being the President of the Pre-Med Club, Vince was a co-organizer of the World of Global Medicine and Human Rights, a Living Learning Community for freshman interested in medicine and is the Community Assistant for that world presently. He is a teaching and research assistant and his research has been published. Vince discovered GIHHR by taking and undergraduate class with Dr’s Alaei and became interested in their work. Throughout his semester’s as a Teaching Assistant with them, he has enjoyed learning from them, and other students about their backgrounds and views on various health and human rights issues. After graduation, Vince plans on applying to medical school.

Yadurshini Raveendran

Yadurshini transferred to the University at Albany in the spring of 2015 from Sri Lanka. She is a dual-major in Human Biology/Biology with a minor in English. When Yadurshini is not busy in college, she loves to spend time with her friends, cook, and read poetry. After graduation, she plans to continue pursuing her education by studying for an advanced degree in the health sciences. Yadurshini discovered GIHHR while casually searching for a job or internship in the Albany area, and even though she has only been here for a short while, Yadurshini is extremely passionate about what she does. Some of the main projects that she has worked on in her time with GIHHR include working on creating better community bonds between law enforcement and the refugee community here in Albany, as well as contributing to a program to help law enforcement develop a tool for the rapid assessment of the mentally ill. Additionally, Yadurshini is working on a proposal working on enhancing human rights for women and displaced victims in Sri Lanka. The most important thing that Yadurshini has learned while working at GIHHR is how much of a positive impact an individual or small group of people can have on the world, no matter the obstacle standing in their way.

Alex Bradt

Alex is a psychology major with a minor in criminal justice here at the University at Albany. This semester was her first with GIHHR, and during this time, Alex has done research and aided in the creation of a tool to help police officers when they come into contact with people with mental disabilities. While not in the office or in class you might find Alex outdoors enjoying a hike or with friends at a concert. After graduation Alex would like to move to the west coast and continue pursuing her passion of psychology by becoming a substance abuse counselor.
Lindsey Riback

Lindsey is a senior public health major with a double minor in journalism and history. After graduating, Lindsey plans to continue her education and complete her Master’s in Public Health with a concentration in epidemiology and global health. She first discovered GIHHR as a freshman while taking Kamiar and Arash’s course “Health and Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach.” During her past two years working with the GIHHR she has been a part of two major projects - applying for an NIH grant to research the long term care needs of the aging HIV population and a Department of State grant for research into the human rights of women, children and disabled persons in Afghanistan. Last year Lindsey also assisted with producing the manuscript for “Risk Factors for Injection versus Non-Injection Drug Use among Men in Kermanshah City, Iran in 2005: An Observational Study,” which will be submitted to the Elsevier International Journal of Drug Policy. In addition to the projects Lindsey has worked on, she has also learned the importance of not only understanding health-related information, but also being able to relay that information to the public in a clear and culturally sensitive manner.

September Johnson

September is a public health major with minors in psychology and educational studies. She is an aspiring public health professional with hopes to work in the fields of international development, reproductive health, substance use prevention and recovery and HIV/AIDS. When September is not in the office, you can find her touring local coffee shops or hiking somewhere in the woods. Following graduation she plans to work for a couple of years and then return to school to earn her Masters of Public Health. Additionally, she hopes to earn her DrPH. September discovered GIHHR through a friend her sophomore year and she has been here ever since. Currently, September serves as the Intern Coordinator and as a Project Coordinator. During her time here, September has researched and wrote reports on health and human rights indicators with regards to HIV/AIDS. She has also helped coordinate our Health Law Project which provides health and human rights training to students in the Middle East. The research and leadership skills that September has learned while at GIHHR will benefit her for years to come. The work and information she has learned while here has influenced and encouraged her to stay on a career path within human rights.

Sharareh Biglari

Sharareh is a second year Master student in Urban and Regional Planning. She is also an international student originally from Iran. In the near future Sharareh hopes to find a full time job and also attend a PhD program. Currently, Sharareh is a graduate assistant and is working on our Environmental Project and projects dealing with HIV/AIDS. Being an international student, Sharareh was very excited to work in a place full of young American and International students. Despite interning being a serious job, Sharareh has found working at GIHHR to be very fun and has made some of her greatest friends here.

Krista Bennett

Krista began at GIHHR as a part of her social welfare field placement. As a social welfare intern, she worked on building her research and program development skills. Krista’s current position is a research assistant. She is working on a manuscript titled “Street Gang Members’ Right to Health: Pursuing Evidence-Based Intervention for HIV Prevention and Care. The expected outcome of the article is that street gang members will be targeted as a key population. She developed Project Eridu: Increasing Access to Self Advocacy Among ESL Inmates, a project that translates legal memos for prisoners into their preferred language. Currently, Krista is a non-traditional student, a mother of two children (one with a genetic disorder that causes autistic-like symptoms), a wife, and a volunteer for nonprofit organizations. She will graduate this spring and continue to obtain her Masters in Social Work. As a social worker, Krista wants to work on a micro level within the New York State prison system. As a corrections social worker, she wants to assist her clients to realize their strengths and build upon their resiliency.
Accepted/Ongoing Grants

- **USAID – $1,600,000.00**
  “Bridging the Gaps in Human Rights Law in Iran Through Enhancing Health Law Capacity”

- **USAID – $1,380,000.00**
  “Training in Leadership in Health, Environment, and Sustainable Development”

- **USAID – $176,000.00**
  “Science Diplomacy”

- **USAID – $53,000.00**
  “Global Health Diplomacy”

- **IREX – $50,000.00**
  “Interdisciplinary capacity building for women’s health”

- **Amanat Foundation – $25,000.00**
  “Delivering Online Academic Courses for Displaced Syrian Students”

- **Anonymous Foundation – $25,000.00**
  In addition to the Amonat grant, the price has been matched by an anonymous donor

Submitted Grants

- **USAID – $10,000,000.00**
  “To Promote and Integrate a Rights-Based Approach in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Service for Key Populations in Tajikistan (TJ), Kazakhstan (KZ), Ukraine (U), and Kyrgyzstan (KY)”

- **UKAID – £ 2,800,000.00**
  “Higher Education in economics”

- **World Bank – $900,000.00**
  “Higher Education in Syria”

- **USAID – $247,000.00**
  “Enhancing Legal Protections for Women, Children, and the Disabled Through Advanced Training for Afghan Advocates, Health Professionals and Legal Professionals on the Rights of Women, Children, and Persons with Disabilities”

- **NIH – $275,000.00**
  “Advancing Structural Interventions to Address the Political Economy Surrounding Intravenous Drug Users in Afghanistan”

- **NIH – $275,000.00**
  “Developing a functional disability Construct for older HIV/AIDS individuals”

- **IREX – $44,000.00**
  “Maternal mortality and morbidity in Iraq”

- **NYS DOS – $30,000.00**
  “HIV access among immigrant populations in New York”

Recent Publications

“Hepatitis C infection and other drug-related harms among inpatients who injected drugs in Turkey”
From: Journal of Viral Hepatitis


Throughout the year there have been multiple articles highlighting the work of Arash and Kamiar Alaei and the GIHHR including:

http://www.nature.com/news/trump-immigration-ban-upends-international-work-on-disease-1.21420
New Patroon Award

The GIHHR was awarded the New Patroon Award by the Albany Roundtable, a volunteer, non-profit corporation, in 2016 for the Institute’s influential work on health and human rights. This honor is given to individuals and organizations who dedicate their time to serving the community through education and development.

For over two decades, the Albany Roundtable offered the ‘Good Patroon Award,’ which was given to leaders who had spent many years aiding their communities over time. The ‘New Patroon Award’ was created in 2011 to recognize the work of newer organizations and their accomplishments in providing services to their communities.

The GIHHR accepted the award at a luncheon in January 12, where Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan was the featured speaker. In addition to this recognition, the GIHHR was awarded with 500 dollars from the Albany Roundtable.

GIHHR Living-Learning Community (L-LC)

The World of Global Medicine and Human Rights, a SUNY Albany L-LC Program in collaboration with the GIHHR, has been very active over the past few months both in and out of the classroom. In addition to hearing from various guest speakers from the Department of Health, Albany Law School, and private medical practice, the students have gone on two trips to Albany Medical Center to learn more about the health field. These trips have included many different health professions such as nursing, physician’s assistant, and social work type careers to outline the various jobs there are inside medicine. The second trip outlined the steps from being a medical student, to resident, and all the way to a long time attending physician. With these experiences, students are given great opportunities that expose them to real world problems and solutions. The program also allows the students to bond together though a variety of activities, including a recent trip to Dave and Buster for a game night. The spring semester holds many All-World type events such as the War of the Worlds, Video Competition, and End of Year Award Ceremony.
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Mackenzie Darling
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