

“I’M CERTIFIED AS A SURGEON AND PHYSICIAN IN TWO COUNTRIES BUT NOT HERE. I HAD TO START FROM ZERO AGAIN, BUT MEDICINE IS MY PASSION. I DON’T CARE ABOUT TITLES. I HAVE DEVOTED MY LIFE TO HELPING PEOPLE, AND I WON’T GIVE THAT UP.”

— RANA HABBOUSH



○ PROFILE

Grit and Hope

IN 2003, RANA HABBOUSH CONTEMPLATED A brand-new world order — turbulent but one that offered fresh opportunities for herself and her new family. The Iraqi native had just completed her medical degree the year before, was married and pregnant with her first child, and in the first year of her new career as a surgeon when the US invasion of Iraq took place.

Shortly after the fall of Baghdad, Habboush gave birth in the city’s only working hospital. “It was the first reported birth in the city after the US arrived,” Habboush said. “The media dubbed my son, ‘the child of liberty.’”

Now in a new country, Habboush had to again take her medical exams to recertify as a physician and spend four years in residency with the Jordanian Royal Medical Services in Amman. Upon earning her degree, she then served as a physician and medical supervisor for a nonprofit serving refugees from Iraq and Syria.

“The experience of working with refugees transformed me,” Habboush said. “When you’re in a new country, having left everything behind, finding proper medical care can be a challenge. I knew what that was like and felt passionate about helping others.”

But without permanent residency in Jordan, Habboush and her family eventually decided to move again, this time to San Diego. Once more, she found herself unable to practice medicine.

“I’m certified as a surgeon and physician in two countries, but I had to start from zero again,” she said. “Medicine is my passion. I don’t care about titles. I have devoted my life to helping people, and I won’t give that up.”

In 2018, she joined the physician’s assistant program at the University of Utah.

“Rana’s active engagement, wealth of life experience, and past medical knowledge has really enriched the entire class,” said Jennifer Coombs, PhD, PA-C, MPAS, associate professor in the physician assistant program. “She is a leader.”

“I love the mission of the U,” Habboush said. “Everyone here has been so supportive. We are all focused on helping people, regardless of their background. This has been one of the best education experiences I have ever had.”

Currently back in San Diego for her second year of clinical-field training, Habboush said that she still intends to work with refugees in the US. Her first son, “the child of liberty,” is now 17 and on track to graduate at the top of his class. She is proud of the numerous possibilities before him.

“I tell my kids to work hard, to help others, and to always stay optimistic,” Habboush said. “I’ve had a number of challenges in life but — with grit and hope — I turn them into opportunities for myself and others.”

[FACULTY NOTES]



JEFFREY P. ROSENBLUTH, MD

The University of Utah recognized Rosenbluth, the Craig H. Neilsen Presidential Endowed Chair of Spinal Cord Injury Medicine, with its Distinguished Innovation Award for his decades of visionary work to promote health, independence, and an active lifestyle for individuals with spinal-cord injuries.



MICHAEL DEININGER, MD, PHD

Deininger, professor and chief of the Division of Hematology and Hematologic Malignancies, was awarded the 2019 Rowley Prize by the International Chronic Myeloid Leukemia Foundation for groundbreaking research targeting “on-off switches” inside affected blood cells.



WENDY HOBSON-ROHRER, MD, MSPH

Hobson-Rohrer was appointed associate vice president of health sciences education. In this new role, she will focus on educational programs and initiatives across the health sciences, identify and leverage the university’s distinct strengths, and build engagement and educational integration among colleges and schools.



Protein Origami

Peter Shen, PhD, and Chris Hill, DPhil, both from the SOM’s Department of Biochemistry, determined the structure of Cdc48, a protein that unfolds other proteins inside living cells, and published the results this past summer in *Science*. “Cdc48 is like a Swiss Army knife of the cell — it can interact with so many different substrates,” said Shen. “Until now we didn’t have an understanding exactly of how it works.” Their discovery could lead to new approaches for treating a form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).