

The Sun-Times is free but the journalism is not. Reader support powers the news. Here's how you can help.



HEALTH SUBURBAN CHICAGO POLITICS

Chicago-area doctor returns to native Syria to revive war-torn nation's ailing health system

Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh is leading efforts to rebuild Syria's devastated medical infrastructure, working with the Syrian American Medical Society to deliver urgent care and train local health care workers.

By Rafaela Jinich | Feb 17, 2025, 12:22pm CST



Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh, president of the Syrian American Medical Society, works at Affiliated Oncologists in Orland Park. | Pat Nabong

SHARE

COPY LINK

Skip Ad

For the first time in 13 years, Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh was walking through the streets o

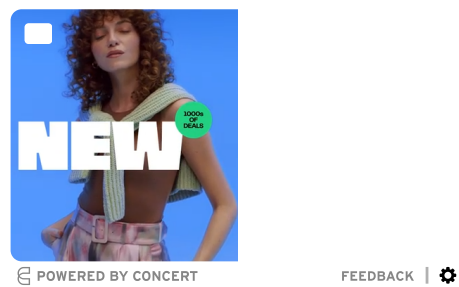
0:25 / 0:30

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

You're in the top 2% of Sun-Times readers. Help us keep quality news free.

Donate

Now back in Chicago, Hamadeh, an oncologist, had been in Syria on a mission with the Syrian American Medical Society to deliver urgent care and help rebuild hospitals in war-torn regions.



“Syria’s medical system is in ruins,” Hamadeh said last week . “Years of war, corruption and sanctions have left hospitals without even the most basic supplies.”

Over the past decade, Syria’s medical infrastructure has been in shambles due to years of conflict, government mismanagement and international sanctions. Hospitals lack essential supplies like oxygen, fuel and basic medications, leaving millions without adequate care.

SAMS, founded by Syrian American doctors in response to the country’s civil war, has expanded into an international nonprofit providing critical medical aid. On this latest mission, which ran from Jan. 24 to Feb. 9, Hamadeh and a team of 22 doctors — many from Chicago — worked to deliver urgent care, repair hospital infrastructure and train health care workers.



Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh, president of the Syrian American Medical Society | Pat Nabong/Sun-Times

For Hamadeh, this mission was deeply personal. Born in Syria, he moved to Chicago as a child and then returned to Syria for 20 years. He completed his medical training in Damascus before relocating back to the U.S.

But he was unable to go back to Syria after that — his work with the Syrian American Medical Society prevented him from returning for more than a decade due to restrictions on humanitarian workers imposed by the Syrian government.

With the **collapse in December of the oppressive regime of Bashar al-Assad**, that all changed. Wandering free in Damascus was “an overwhelming experience,” said Hamadeh, who practices in Orland Park and lives in Chicago.

“For the first time in 13 years, I felt a sense of freedom and hope,” Hamadeh said. “One of the most emotional moments was returning to Damascus University, where I studied medicine 42 years ago. It reinforced my commitment to SAMS and to rebuilding Syria’s health care system.”

Dr. Mufaddal Hamadeh and his team of SAMS doctors during their mission in Syria, where they trained local physicians. | Provided

The team performed surgeries, helped treat trauma patients and set up training programs for Syrian medical professionals. They also launched new programs in oncology and cardiovascular care to address long-neglected needs.

“We conducted cardiac catheterizations and provided stents for patients who had been waiting months — some even years — for proper treatment,” Hamadeh said.

Syria’s health system has been battered by years of armed conflict, and public health concerns are escalating amid the crisis, according to the World Health Organization. With more than 16.7 million Syrians in need of assistance, the country’s deteriorating health care infrastructure is failing to meet even the most basic medical needs.

×

RELATED

With Assad out, we owe it to Syria to help rebuild

Many hospitals in government-controlled areas require extensive aid, as these regions support compared with northern Syria.

Skip Ad

0:25 / 0:30

Hospitals in Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus benefited from emergency aid, while Syrian medical students received hands-on training in specialized procedures. SAMS also set up simulation labs to teach critical care techniques.

“We found that areas under regime control needed significantly more help than the north and northwest, which we were already assisting,” said Hamadeh. “This mission was medical, but we are also working to expand our efforts into recently liberated areas.”

While SAMS focuses on immediate medical relief, the long-term goal is to establish permanent health care centers across Syria, particularly in recently liberated areas with little access to care. However, funding challenges pose a major hurdle.

“USAID funding is currently suspended, and overall international aid has been declining,” Hamadeh said. “We are working on securing other sources, but continued support is crucial.”

Despite these challenges, he remains hopeful.


“The people of Syria, especially young doctors and medical students, need to know they are not alone,” Hamadeh said. “Through SAMS, we are not only delivering aid but helping rebuild a health care system that can sustain future generations.”

 SHARE

 COPY LINK

Vital Chicago news relies on you

The mission of the Sun-Times team—reporters, photographers, editors—is to bring you stories every day about the Chicago area. That’s news, features and sports, from pro to prep. As the only Washington Bureau Chief from a Chicago news outlet, my priority in DC is to report on government and political news with a Chicago angle. In order for the Sun-Times to continue delivering our journalism, our operation has to be financially viable. As a community-funded nonprofit newsroom, we rely on your support to continue our vital work. Please consider making a donation to help sustain our newsroom and the important stories we bring to you.



Lynn Sweet

Washington Bureau Chief

Monthly

Annual

\$15.00 /mo

\$9.00 /mo

\$7.00 /mo

Make a one time donation here

Contribute Today



Skip Ad

0:25 / 0:30

NEXT UP IN NEWS

- New Social Security chief contradicts Trump, Musk claims that millions of dead people are getting payouts
- Johnson's \$830 million bond issue stalls in City Council
- Pritzker unveils \$55.2 billion budget with no new taxes, compares Trump playbook to the Nazi movement
- Pritzker proposes crackdown on crypto ATMs to address scams, money-laundering
- City drinking water closeness to sewer lines poses concerns, watchdog warns
- SUV driver charged with reckless homicide after collision with Metra Electric Line train in South Chicago



Skip Ad

0:25 / 0:30

LATEST STORIES

Lonzo Ball explains his loyalty and giving Bulls a hometown discount

New Social Security chief contradicts Trump, Musk claims that millions of dead people are getting payouts

Seth Jones talking with Blackhawks about trade possibility: 'I would like to give myself a chance to win'

Cubs' Shota Imanaga thanks predecessors before making Opening Day history with Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto

As White Sox camp gets rolling, a 'more confident' Chris Getz convinced he made right hire in Will Venable

Sponsored Content



Elon Musk is failing to cut...

The Economist



Amazon Is Losing Money as...

Online Shopping Tools



How to get people to resign

The Economist



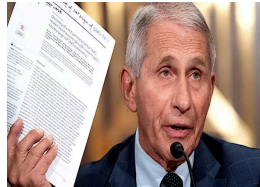
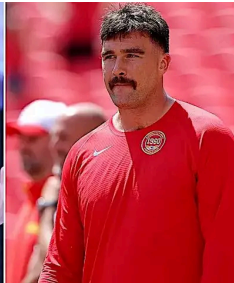
Seniors Can Now Fly Business Cla...

Online Shopping Tools



Elon Musk Insults Travis Kelce with Inappropriate Comment about Taylo...

TMSPN



Trump's move against Fauci causes public...

JPost



Extra-Large Headed Human Species Found in...

JPost



THE LATEST

Skip Ad

0:25 / 0:30

CITY HALL

Johnson's \$830 million bond issue stalls in City Council

Ald. Bill Conway and Ald. Anthony Beale teamed up to delay the vote on the bond issue for one meeting. Conway has complained about the size of the borrowing as well as its financing structure, which saddles Chicago taxpayers with \$2 billion in added costs.

By **Fran Spielman** | Feb 19, 2025, 3:06pm CST

POLITICS

Pritzker unveils \$55.2 billion budget with no new taxes, compares Trump playbook to the Nazi movement

The Democratic governor also peppered his seventh budget blueprint — which Republicans derided as the largest in state history — with key policy proposals for the upcoming fiscal year.

By **Tina Sfondeles** , **Mitchell Armentrout** , and 1 more | Feb 19, 2025, 3:06pm CST

THE WATCHDOGS

Pritzker proposes crackdown on crypto ATMs to address scams, money-laundering

The governor is expected to use his State of the State address to pitch legislation to establish a daily limit for transactions on crypto ATMs, cap fees to “prevent predatory charges,” and require receipts showing the dollar value of digital assets and any fees collected.

By **Tom Schuba** and **Frank Main** | Feb 19, 2025, 2:43pm CST

NBA

LaVar Ball, father of Bulls guard Lonzo Ball, undergoes foot amputation: report

The Ball family has not commented on LaVar’s health issues, TMZ reported.

By **Sun-Times staff** | Feb 19, 2025, 2:40pm CST

ENVIRONMENT

City drinking water closeness to sewer lines poses concerns, watchdog warns

Chicago’s Inspector General says that sewer lines are too close to water mains, a problem the city has known about since 2019.

By **Brett Chase** | Feb 19, 2025, 2:25pm CST



Public



Skip Ad