Dr. Abdullah Al Sayyari is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and is currently the Head of Nephrology and Renal Transplantation and a Professor of Medicine at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. Beforehand, received his Bachelors Degree in Biochemistry and Doctoral Degree from the University of London and continued on to do his Masters at Sheffield Hallam University. Dr. Abdullah Al Sayyari has made an enormous contribution to medical research, having participated in over 250 research publications to date. He is an author of multiple books on the topic of Nephrology and is even Co-Founder of Arabnephrol, an Internet discussion group that collaborates with the International Society of Nephrology. Dr. Abdullah Al Sayyari is a member of numerous associations such as the Renal Association of Great Britain and the International Society for Artificial Organs, and is also a part of many important committees worldwide.

What is your view on research in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
Most of my research is clinical, where I began looking into it quite a long time ago. You will find that as the country is becoming more viable, the research activity increases. That is what is happening here in this institution where in the last two years the research in the Kingdom has amplified. We are actually doing more research than most Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Morocco.

"You have to know that motivation and mentorship is key, and that as a researcher you must have the courage to push the envelope."
What drew you into this field?
My interest began when I was younger, and I pursued it all out of curiosity. I have 184 peer reviewed articles and have been a part of over 250 publications to date, and this is all because of my desire to enjoy knowledge for the sake of knowledge. What has happened in the last 5 years in regards to research is phenomenal and I am fascinated. You have to know that motivation and mentorship is key, and that as a researcher you must have the courage to push the envelope. Very often you will find people not wanting to research because it is difficult, however as soon as they do it once it becomes much less intimidating. It is now a part of the student’s requirement that they must fulfill and we have seen very positive outcomes from this. The research becomes enjoyable for them and I always see them come back when it is not a requirement. This is because we have opened their minds to a world they didn’t know existed.

What areas of research do you concentrate on?
I focus on two areas; one is scientific and is related to nephrology, and one is related to ethics and empathy as I am also Chairman of the Ethics Committee here. We did a very interesting research study on empathy that I would like to share. We compared two dialysis centers in Riyadh where one had mostly Saudi nurses and the other had no Saudi nurses. We asked the patients in both centers about the empathy of the nurses and similar questions. It turns out the empathy was the same in both centers and language has nothing to do with it. It is all about body language, smiling, and general care.

Looking into the future, what excites you about research and its affect on the Kingdom going forward?
What excites me is a number of things. Its growing exponentially. Did you know that there are 150,000 students on King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud’s Scholarship? You can only imagine the changes these students will make when they come back as highly educated individuals that want to make a difference. This is a renaissance period where we need to endlessly thank our King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz AlSaud for his generosity.

Is there anything new you would like to share in nephrology?
In nephrology I’m looking at a new marker for kidney injury. There is a new marker that can detect the injury before it even happens as a preventative measure, which we will provide for much better treatment early on and perhaps delay or even eliminate the need for a transplant. The marker for example says that this patient is at risk for renal failure, which is a preventative measure and the treatment will be individualized according to the cause of the injury. Up until now, nephrologists were facing difficulties because all the markers they had were for function, which basically only detects after injury. Prevention is key because of a much healthier quality of life, cost savings, and less trauma for the family.

Will the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia be an exporter of knowledge?
Of course it will. To do this you need the money, the culture, and a ruler who is pushing for it which is exactly what we have. We have a high percentage of females in the Parliament, 30 percent, which is one of the highest in the world at the moment. Things are changing, and the Kingdom has become more pro-women and you can see that clearly in the judicial system.