Obituary: Professor Parvaneh Vossough

Iranian pediatric hematology and oncology community has suffered a great loss, as Professor Parvaneh Vossough, pioneer of modern pediatric hematology and oncology in Iran passed away on May 19, 2013 at the age of 78. She studied medicine at Tehran University of Medical Sciences and completed her internship and pediatric residency at renowned medical centers in the United States. Afterwards, she moved to Washington D.C. where she completed her fellowship program in pediatric hematology and oncology at Georgetown University Medical Center. Thereafter, she was appointed as attending pediatric oncologist at M.D. Anderson Medical Center in Houston, Texas. In 1968, parental illness caused her to return to Iran for a short visit at which time she not only felt the longing love of her family but realized the much needed medical care for children suffering from various malignancies in her country. Having decided to come back and serve in her country Iran, she resigned from her position and rejected all other job offers in the United States. This was the beginning of a lifelong carrier filled with love and dedication. She founded the first department for pediatric hematology and oncology in Iran at the AliAsghar (formerly Shahrzad) Children's Medical Center. With enthusiasm and devotion, she trained and taught her nursing staff and pediatric residents the manner and know-how to handle not only pediatric patients but also their distraught parents. Not surprisingly, in a very short time, her department became literally the most frequented referral center for childhood malignancies. I met Doctor Vossough first in 1974 at the Shohada (formerly Reza Pahlavi) Medical Center, where she worked as part-time consultant at the pediatric department. Our mutual ethical and working principles and academic interests led to a close collaboration and friendship which lasted almost 40 years. Together with few other colleagues we launched the first out-patient oncology clinic on voluntary and non-profitable basis at the mentioned center. In the early eighties, acute thalassemia was a major public health problem with limited financial and manpower resources to provide effective medical treatment for the affected children.

Doctor Vossough, by then appointed professor of pediatrics at Iran Medical University, assisted other colleagues in curbing thalassemia incidences by premarital screening for beta-thalassemia trait as a pre-requisite for marriage – an approach which has since become mandatory by law. She encouraged and supported the newly established Iranian Thalassemia Society to achieve its main goals, namely country wide accessibility of blood transfusion facilities and supervised application of standard treatment protocols for all thalassemia patients. In the early nineteen eighties, her department became one of the three centers eligible to train pediatric hematology-oncology fellows. In the three decades that followed, she trained a great number of highly qualified pediatric hematologist-oncologists, who have attained academic positions or have private practice in various locations throughout the country. Furthermore, she tutored over one hundred doctoral candidates.

Also in early eighties, she became members in International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP) and regularly attended their annual meetings presenting her research data. She also gained observer status at annual I-BFM meetings. The first international pediatric congress held in MAHAK and later SIOP Asia meeting held in Kish with participation of renowned pediatric oncologists were significant events further acknowledging her academic and scientific acceptance by international pediatric oncology societies.

She was constantly concerned about children with malignant diseases, many of whom were deprived of adequate medical services. In the early nineties, MAHAK – the Society to Support Children Suffering from Cancer started its activities as a charitable society to support children suffering from cancer and their respective families. Professor Vossough recognized early the importance of this institution and its goals and objectives and accepted the offer to chair its board of trustees. In due time, MAHAK expanded its social services activities and managed by the middle of the first decade of 2000 to build a cancer medical and research center for childrenAfter a long and fruitful career as an academician, Professor Vossough retired from university professorship and concurrently accepted the medical chairpersonship of this center on a voluntary basis, which expanded under her guidance into a comprehensive pediatric cancer treatment and research center (MPCRTC), matching or bettering all other centers in Iran and the region. It is noteworthy to mention that from the very beginning, MAHAK enjoyed public trust and generous financial support

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in the form of donations, enabling it to expand its social services, building the MPCTRC and offering all medical and support services free of charge. This great institution is continuously expanding its coverage where by 2013, it is covering 90% of pediatric cancer patients from needy backgrounds.

Professor Vossough had a unique personality in terms of her moral values and modesty, sense of social responsibility and love and devotion for her patients; academic dedication for her fellows and students; respect for her colleagues and co-workers; love for her family members; and generosity for the destitute and needy. As a gesture, she would host a fast-breaking dinner during the month of Ramadan where she would invite the families of all the patients. In the first year of her passing, MAHAK continued this tradition in the memory of this great lady while simultaneously inaugurating its eye clinic – another development with the foundations laid by Professor Vossough in the presence of dignitaries such as Doctor Shams on July 26, 2013. May her soul rest in peace.

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