

Special Article

Reminiscences of Prof. SR Khan on Prof. Abu Zafar

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The founder of modern cardiology of the country, ex Director of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, Dhaka and a Member of the Royal College of Physician of United Kingdom, Professor Abu Zafar was born in a Muslim family of village Chachanya of Sathiya in Pabna. His father Haji Mohammad Mohiuddin was an eminent merchant in Narayanganj and mother was housewife. Zafar went to local School, then to Bera High school and passed matriculation (SSC) from Joy Govinda High School at Narayanganj in 1954 in first division. Then he proceeded to Jagannath College (now Jagannath University) and passed ISc in 1956 in first division.

The same year he was admitted to Dhaka Medical College and passed MBBS in 1963. After internship he went to England in 1964 and worked in various hospitals and was admitted to Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of United Kingdom.

After returning to Bangladesh he joined Rajshahi Medical College in 1976. and later was transferred to the Institute of Postgraduate Medicine and Research (now, Bangabandhu Sheikh Medical University). Then he joined Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases where he developed a cardiac unit, enriched and enlarged the Coronary Care Unit, started echocardiography, colour Doppler, cardiac catheterization. and established pacemaker treatment, at the same time developed angiography, Professor Zafar encouraged to develop coronary bypass surgery and became an important member of the team.

After a hijacked Japanese plane landed in Dhaka airport which was successfully negotiated and released by our Air Force Chief, the Japanese Government sent a minister to thank and express gratitude who happened to be a Health Minister who offered the services of a modern cardiovascular centre. So it started in the existing NICVD for 5 years including exchange of the experts, supply of equipment, maintenance engineering and financial assistance. Prof. Zafar went to National Cardiovascular Centre; Osaka for three months visit in 1982.

He played a significant role to improve the overall standard of higher education on cardiovascular diseases and treatment in Bangladesh. He was not only father of modern echocardiography but he also pioneered implanting pacemaker in this country. In his long bright career he also served as Head of the Department of Cardiology at the IPGMR

As an academician he enlightened and inspired many cardiologists who are now bearing the torch and providing treatment all over the country. In his long career, as a doctor he always tried to help his patients in every way possible. He stood by the needy by providing free treatment and arranging free medicine. He also ensured that the patients are not unnecessarily taking the burden of diagnostics which are not needed. He also arranged for free pacemaker and surgery for the underprivileged in the society.

He will be remembered by his students as an idol to look up to the patients as a person with a loving smile which heals. Apart from all these he was well liked and highly sought after and in great demand in his private practice because of his scrupulous attention to detail and his kind and sympathetic attitude. He did not like to see too many patients till very late just only for earning money. He did not like any publicity.

Demands of a specialist cardiologist, the Director of the institute and same time as husband and father he met squarely. Money earned from a very long busy practice was not everything to him. This sense of balance made him a decent person.

His knowledge was impeccable and comprehensive, experience was wide, teaching very sincerely and examining the students fairly conferring MD and Diploma in Cardiology. His financial dealings were scrupulous and honest; had to do a lot of such dealings as a Director.

He was wise but not worldly. He lived comfortably but not luxuriously although he could if he wanted to. I was his longtime and close friend and as a friend he was trustworthy and dependable. He did not have to undertake so-called practical means

which would undermine anything moral or ethical and because of his genuine manners he was not very popular to some but he was true to himself.

At times various things worried him too much but some friendly suggestions helped him to overcome all these. He was a devout Bangladeshi heart and soul. He was not in politics. His policy was how to get patients better.

He was awarded a piece of land in Baridhara but could not construct anything there because lack of fund for quite a while and during this time some unscrupulous person occupied this land to which he was at a loss. I intervened and managed to evict the illegal occupant then he started building a humble house which is still there. Repeated requests to go for a multistoried flat by a reputable builder which he did not listen for a while but eventually agreed and signed but did not see it happen. Zafar left behind his good wife and a son working as an executive in a reputed bank and a daughter Sheela who is in Canada. Zafar used to take Sheela's daughter to school with great pleasure while they were here.

One of his best friends was Doctor Sukumar who is in general practice in Blackpool England.

He was a pious person but liberal minded. He was not a sporty person in field and track neither in

indoor games. He was all brain and not muscles! After retirement he continued private practice for a while but slowly discontinued and was very happy to take care of the granddaughter, the family and his garden including a nice little vegetable patch growing very succulent ladies' fingers which I picked at times.

Recently his COPD got worse and finally he had to be ventilated. He passed away on 3rd May, 2020; his Namaze Janaza was held at Baridhara Mosque and finally rested at Banani.

Ex-Director of NICVD an architect of modern cardiology and kind hearted doctor a loyal friend and affectionate and caring father a good husband and a very loving grandfather was Zafar.

My dear Zafar as you cared for everyone when you were present, in your absence all pray for you. May Allah Subhan Wa Tala grant you the bliss of Jannatul Firdaus forever and forever . Ameen.

This is a very modest portrait of his life.

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