

## IN MEMORIAM

**IMAD MELKI (1957 - 2020)**

### **A bravest commitment for children**

<http://www.lebanesemedicaljournal.org/articles/68-3/inmemoriam.pdf>

I met Imad in 1974, before the war... and that's a long time to go... Since he was a student and all through his professorship, Imad kept the same outspoken personality, a vivid empathy towards his colleagues and friends, a firm engagement towards his family, unshakeable patriotic convictions, a grass-rooted dedication for child health and an unstoppable proactivity in teaching...

Until the very end, Imad kept asking and questing, caring and healing, as if life would be ending tomorrow, as if all business and life plans needed to be urgently finalized, busy working until his last breath...

All along his life journey, Imad has been a loving husband and father, a faithful friend, a patriotic citizen, a trustful administrator, a reliable colleague, a genuine childcare leader and an engaged coach.

As he started hospital work, Imad triggered the new neonatal unit in Hôtel-Dieu university hospital, that he chaired – as well as the pediatric division – until he passed away.

All along the way, he set and updated national guidelines and protocols in neonatal care and newborn resuscitation, cocreated the multicentric NCPNN (National Collaborative Perinatal Neonatal Network) and took neonatology to higher levels, at national, regional and international platforms. However, his most important quality, his true identity, is his humane imprint...

Imad was always present when called upon, in spite of all his sufferings and ails; Imad was always available to support his peers when he identified human pain, even when he was himself in silent pain.

Imad went through a 10-year endless calvary of three successive malignant diseases and two bone marrow transplants, with an extraordinary courage, an unlimited resistance, a longstanding willingness to serve, an unbending faith and a trusting belief that *“Thy will be done”*. Imad never complained about his recurrent terrible diseases; at all times, he wouldn't say *“I am afraid to die”* but rather *“I cannot afford to die”*, fully conscious of his family duties and of his life task to carry his familial ship to safe shores, until he said more recently *“I have done what needed to be done”*, fully aware that he was walking the last straight line, in peace of mind and soul that *“Thy will be done”*.

Imad and I would endlessly argue about politics and



whether the glass was half-full or half-empty, and as we had to get back to work, we would postpone our endless arguments to an after-death confrontation across the neighboring syriac and protestant cemetery wall... to infinity and beyond, like Buzz and Woody in *Toy Story*... But through all hardships, we would nurture the same wish to finally see a beautiful Lebanon blossom for and with our children. As grandsons of 1916 Sayfo and Safarbarlek, we had an exceptional and organic attachment to Lebanon, during wartime and peace, across all riots and social uprisings, thus serving the medical needs of the population on the frontline and in healthcare settings. Even when Imad would hardly be able to stand and walk, he would still stand up and walk, serve and help, as an intensivist and as a teacher.

Since we joined Hôtel-Dieu and Saint Joseph University in 1986, his institutional commitment would always be outstanding, with a deep sense of ethical duty and human dignity, even when severely ill, even on his deathbed...

Furthermore, on a happier note, we perpetuated the warm custom of organizing familial socio-professional

gatherings since Carlo Akatcherian created the pediatric department, and later on with George Hage.

So when I decided in 2018, in accordance with the dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Prof. Roland Tomb, to anchor more on child protection and global child health, and revitalize a Pediatric Alumni, Imad suggested to boost our HDF pediatric meetings by gathering a group dinner, and there it was... A warm homecoming dinner, where pediatricians from USJ met and promised to participate in this movement. And here we are today, with a PediAlumni of more than 110 USJ pediatricians, through history and geography, in Lebanon and globally... perpetuating USJ values and expanding a strong and sustained network, for the sake of children, for the love of Pediatrics...

We didn't know then that this was also a farewell dinner, but we do know that our PediAlumni will persevere, in the loving memory of Imad, within the long-standing mission that Carlo Akatcherian triggered and for the endless purpose of better serving and saving children... That is what we pray and act for!

Rest in eternal peace, dear Imad, and greet Georges Hage, Georges Korkmaz, Jamil Zogheib, Mohamad Ajam and Gisele Moubarak.

Rest in peace for we will keep in our hearts and minds all those gifts you gave us: the laughs within the tears of those terrible 10 years, the precious moments when we argued and feasted at the same time, the unwavering mutual trust through all our shaken history, the steadfast of commitment across opinions... Even the horrendously funny 2006 car accident with Zaki in the bomb trap, where the three of us almost died, and where we even laughingly argued about the color of our blood and our driving sense of leadership.

Rest in peace, dear Imad, for you were a gift to all of us. Rest in peace for our heritage is safe and will not be blown away, whatever the challenges... for with such heroes, pediatrics will overcome and children will prevail!

To infinity and beyond...

Bernard GERBAKA, MD

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