

A Tribute to Professor Dr Rogayah Ja'afar (8th January 1955 to 28th January 2016)

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In the wee hours of 28th January 2016, Professor Dr Rogayah Ja'afar succumbed to severe illness at the Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia in Kubang Kerian, Kelantan after years of battling it - she was 61 years old. Her immediate family members were present at the time of death.

Professor Dr Rogayah was born on January 8, 1955 in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. She was a daughter of Ja'afar bin Ibrahim and Akmal binti Ariffin and was the youngest of eight siblings. Professor Dr Rogayah was married to Professor Zulkifli Ahmad on November 20, 1981 and blessed with four children; Mohammed Ariff, Noor Akmal, Noor Amalina and Noor Adilah.

In an interview with Jane Westberg, Associate Editor, Education for Health Journal at the Network meeting in Linkoping Sweden in September 1999, Professor Dr Rogayah said she enjoyed teaching and thought about being a graduate teacher (1). Having a father suffering from juvenile diabetes and heart problems inspired her to take medicine. Both her parents passed away while she was doing medicine in Egypt. She spent some years as a practicing doctor and then went into academic life, thus combining her interests: medicine and teaching.

Professor Dr Rogayah graduated from the University of Cairo, Egypt in 1980 with Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBCh – Hons) and she was among the pioneers of USM medical school, having joined the school in 1984, just a few years after the intake of the first batch of medical students. She was interested in pursuing further studies in pediatrics, but the founding dean, Professor Dato' Dr Mohd Roslani asked her to take up medical education because the school was then struggling with the concepts of problem-based learning and community orientation, and he wanted to get the Department of Medical Education started. Professor Dr Rogayah obtained her Master of Health Professional Education

(MHPEd) from the University of New South Wales, Australia, in 1986 and her postgraduate fellowship certificate in Health Leadership Development (ICHLD) from the University of Chicago, Illinois, USA, in 2000.

Fulfilling her promise to the dean, she pioneered the Department of Medical Education shortly after she received her master degree. She devoted her life to improve the quality of health education for the health profession by organizing numerous faculty development workshops as well as research related to the field of medical education (2). Her areas of interest were in curriculum development, leadership and partnership, problem-based learning, community-oriented education, student assessment and programme evaluation. She provided expertise and consultancies in Medical and Allied Health Professional Education at the School, National and International levels since 1988. She was also responsible in spearheading the Master of Science (Medical Education) programme and was admired by her students. Dr Azra, one of the graduates of the programme, recalls that:

"...she was a very humble, friendly, resolute and dedicated in carrying out her duties even though she was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. She always encouraged me when I faced many problems in life."

Among the posts that she had in the past was the President of the Malaysian Association of Education for the Medical and Health Sciences (MAEMHS) and was a member of the accreditation panel of the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC) and the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) entrusted with the accreditation of medical and health professional programmes of both public and private institutions in Malaysia.

Professor Dr Rogayah was an internationally-

recognized medical educationist. She held the presidency of the Asian Pacific Association of Problem-Based Learning in the Health Sciences in September 2008. She was also very active internationally in her work on University Community Partnerships as well as Women's Health with the Network: Toward Unity for Health (Network: TUFH), an international NGO of more than 300 member institutions of health professional institutions in close collaboration with the WHO. She became the founding Chairperson of the Women and Health Taskforce of the Network in 2003 and spearheaded the development of the Women and Health Teaching Package. She was granted honorary membership of the Network: TUFH in 2004 and was subsequently elected as its Chairperson in 2006 for a four-year term. She was also appointed as a member of the Board of Directors of Global Health through Education, Training and Services in 2005. She had also been a WHO consultant and short-term advisor to Australia (1998) and Iraq (2002).

Professor Dr Abdul Aziz Baba, ex-dean of the School of Medical Sciences, added that:

"She played a significant role in global health education innovations through her chairmanship of the Network: Toward Unity for Health. This is evidence of her international recognition as a medical educator and raised the profile of SMS and USM internationally."

She contributed significantly in academic publication both as editor and writer both locally and internationally. She was a member of the editorial board of this journal, the Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences since 1996. She was also an active member of the editorial and review boards of a number of national journals (MMJ, Journal of Health Management Institute, Malaysia) and international journals (International E-journal on Problem-Based Learning and Education for Health – the e-journal of the Network: TUFH). In 2009, she was the founding editorial board member of Education in Medicine Journal – a homegrown journal of the Department of Medical Education, School of Medical Sciences, USM.

Despite her illness, diagnosed several years ago and later operated on, she still did not slow her pace, and she continued to work as usual until she needed a second operation later. Cik Jemilah, her right-hand person in the department described her as

"...a strict boss who adhered to her work policy but at the same time a kind-hearted person."

She retired at 58 as a Professor of Medical Education at the School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Professor Dr Rogayah was a very special person with incredible mental vitality and inspirational enthusiasm and commitment in her field. She indeed has made a vital and important contribution in the local and international medical education scene. The legacy of Professor Dr Rogayah Ja'afar in medical education will be forever felt in the heart of medical teachers.

Professor Dr Ahmad Sukari, the current dean of the School of Medical Sciences, summarized the feelings of many:

"The late Professor Dr Rogayah Ja'afar was a very dear friend to all SMS members; academicians and non-academicians. USM and the medical education fraternity will miss her professionalism in tackling academic matters. Her passion in medical education exudes every-time she was engaged in discussion. Her composed words of wisdom reflected her experience."

She will be missed as a colleague, mentor, and friend, and we will hold her memory dear in our hearts. To her family we extend our deeply felt sympathy and to her our unceasing commemoration. May Allah bless her with HIS mercy and grant her a place in Jannah.

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