

Eulogy

Eulogy – Almarhum Prof. Dr. Syed Mohsin Sahil Jamalullahi

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I have lost a close and loyal friend. We had undergone the ups and downs of life, overcome the brickbats and yet, he remained positive of human kind until the very end. To understand these characteristics of the man, it perhaps would be pertinent for me to trace our long relationship from the very beginning.

It was in 1976, when I was just about completed the establishing the Department of Pathology and the academic programme of the first cohort of the medical student in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). I was approached by the senior technologists of the faculty regarding their dilemma in not having a formal qualification and therefore, recognition by the authorities. If my memory serves me, only 2 of them had the requisite for appointment, i.e., the advanced certificate from the Institute of Medical Research (IMR) and the University of Malaya (UM). Their previous training had been "informal" at various medical facilities (including the British Army Laboratory) and their varied functions in UKM from Medical Muzium and Illustration to Animal House Management.

Being the only "pathologist" in UKM, I assembled a small committee from various laboratory disciplines. Mohsin, or 'Moh' as I used to call him, was one of them and he subsequently was the secretary by virtue of his command of Bahasa and his linkage to Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), the National Language Centre. We discussed at length on the structure of a full three-year Diploma Programme and the option for the serving technologists who were in their late thirties and forties. Within a year, we received the green light to proceed and the programme was successfully implemented. Moh worked closely with me as I chaired the committee for the Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of UKM under my role of Deputy Dean.

After my appointment as the Founding Dean in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in July 1979,

I came back to UKM and called up Moh, the late Saidi (my trainee), and Ong (I had made my acquaintance with him when he was the Scientific Officer in Kuala Lumpur Hospital). I told them of my need for abled assistants willing to work aggressively to meet the targets I had set out. I gave them 24 hours to decide. They came back to me in the affirmative.

I know very little of Moh's childhood days but we shared some commonality as our fathers were in the service and were frequently transferred. Temerloh (Pahang) and Anderson School (Ipoh), were 2 places that we both fondly remembered. He completed his Form 6 in Alor Star and proceeded to do his degree in Monash University, followed by his Masters in Melbourne University. He met his future wife in Monash. When they returned in 1976, he joined UKM as a lecturer in Pharmacology.

The first 6 months in USM was a busy period, preparing paper after paper for approval by the authorities (In which I've detailed extensively in my book - Medical Education in Malaysia: Changing the Mind Set). Our routine day ended no earlier than 9 pm and Moh was given charge of human capital and to identify our needs in the immediate, medium, and long terms.

In the midst of our work, we shared some light moments and that was when I recognised the true nature of Moh.

A particularly fond memory that I have of him, was when we first made a trip to Kota Bharu in 1979. We decided to explore the town center, which at the time only consisted of a square and only 3 main hotels - we took a rickshaw to savour the "night" life! With Moh, it didn't matter what we did, but the good company was irreplaceable. Despite all the hard work, we knew how to let our hair loose, and during our (semi-official) work functions Moh would always break in to his favourite song, Widuri – he was a pretty good singer!

Back at work, my aggressiveness unfortunately, did not go down too well with various parties in USM. We were labelled the Ewing family (after the television series, Dallas) - Moh was the Bobby Ewing, the likeable, approachable, sincere and soft-spoken son, and I was the Jock Ewing, the patriarch of the clan. He was the link to the USM crowd and organised games with the other schools. In football, we had in our team footballing legends such as Kamaruzaman Wan Su, Ramli Saad and Roslan from ENT. Moh was our heroic goalkeeper and he kept our opponents at bay.

After the first batch of students were enrolled in July 1981, and the second cohort completed their first year, I discussed with Moh on his future academic enhancement, reminding myself that my work in USM would be completed with the first graduating class and the establishment of the campus in Kubang Kerian.

I highlighted 2 options to him: the suitability of a medical degree versus a doctoral in a medical school, and Moh decided to do the former. He was accepted into the Middlesex Hospital programme, which, on hindsight was probably unsuitable.

He had asked me personally some years later, of the reasons for implementing the USM curriculum and managing it in that way, and my response was to remove the power from biased lecturers and disciplines in a faculty system to determine the passing or failing of students in the examinations.

Unfortunately, this was what happened to him but Moh did not let this dampen his spirits and came back to start footing research in Pharmacology. With the move to Kubang Kerian, he delved deeper into the merits and demerits of local plants. A testament to this would be his various publications and successful postgraduate students that he supervised. His work with Kitasato University earned him the Doctorate in 1995.

Besides his personal achievements, unknown to many, Moh was also a very generous man, having sponsored a postgraduate student. All in all, he lived his life as a man for all seasons, overcame adversity, cared for his family and caring for all who crossed his path.

In spite of knowing that there were people who were backbiting him, he bore no grudges against them. He was a close and loyal friend, and while new friends come and go - it is too late for me now to inculcate new friendships such as the one we had, I will miss him very much.

My dear friend, may Allah shower you with His blessings. Al-fatihah.

Best regards,

Dato' Dr. Mohd Roslani Abdul Majid

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