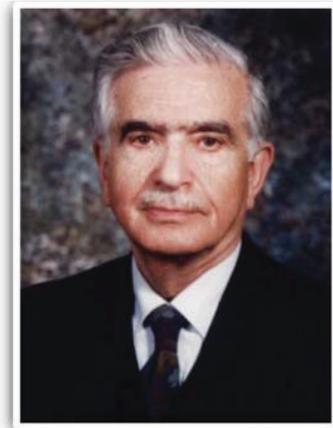


## Obituary

## In the Memory of Dr. Abolhassan Zia-Zarifi (1926 – 2010)

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Dr. Abolhassan Zia-Zarifi

Dr. Abolhassan Zia-Zarifi was born on 20 August 1926 in Lahijan, Gilan Province which lies along the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. He was the eldest son of Haj Issa Zia-Zarifi, a local merchant in Lahijan. Medical practice in Abolhassan's family had around a hundred year history; his grandfather, Hojatollah Hakimbashi was a traditional physician and poet. Abolhassan's paternal uncle, Mirza Abolfazl (Zia-ol Atteba, which means the light of physicians) was also a graduate of medicine of the Dar al-Fonun School in Tehran, which was founded in 1852.<sup>1</sup>

Abolhassan finished his primary school in Lahijan and his high school training in Rasht (the provincial capital of Gilan Province), and in due course, he continued his education initially in biology but after two years he enrolled in the School of Pharmacy of the University of Tehran in 1945 and received his degree in 1952. He married Dr. Touran Zia-Zarifi in 1952.<sup>1-3</sup>

The young and energetic Dr. Zia-Zarifi started his professional career in 1952 in the Ministry of Health (Vezerat-e Behdari) of Isfahan, where he was instrumental in the establishment of the laboratories for control of venereal diseases and addiction.<sup>1</sup>

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In 1956, he went to Tehran and began to focus on pulmonary diseases, in particular tuberculosis, a common fatal disease of the time. He worked at the first tuberculosis diagnosis laboratory which was supervised by Dr. Mehdi Zolriassatian.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Zia-Zarifi went to England to study microbiology for one year. On his return in 1963, his major achievement was the establishment of the Iranian National Reference TB Laboratory, which was regarded as a turning point in effective diagnosis of tuberculosis.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, in 1963, Dr. Zia-Zarifi became a member of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (IUTLD) and later became its vice president for a number of years. He was the Director of IUTLD for several years. In addition, Dr. Zia-Zarifi was a member of the editorial board of IUTLD's periodical for ten years.<sup>2</sup>

In 1968 Dr. Zia-Zarifi continued his training at the Pasteur Institute of Paris and in 1971 he completed his studies on medical laboratory management at the University of Maryland, as well as at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), founded in the USA in 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1975 and 1979, Dr. Zia-Zarifi was appointed as the Director General of Laboratories of the Ministry of Health and during this period, he successfully established over 400 medical laboratories in remote regions with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>1</sup> Due to his outstanding professional endeavors he was nominated

as a consultant to the WHO in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. His combat against fatal diseases was not restricted to Iran and in the early 1970s, he fought against cholera in Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and the Congo in 1972. He was an expert of the WHO's Emergency Team between 1974 and 1996.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Zia-Zarifi retired in 1978, but his professional efforts continued and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, he joined the faculty of Shaheed Behshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran in 1990. He was also one of the founders of the National Research Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (NRITLD) affiliated with Shaheed Behshti University of Medical Sciences, established in 1991.<sup>3</sup> Currently, NRITLD is a well-organized research and educational center on pulmonary diseases, particularly tuberculosis. He was a founder of Iran's National Tuberculosis Day. In 2007, in recognition of his enduring effort in fighting tuberculosis, he was chosen as an Honorary Member of the IUTLD.

In addition to his professional and educational endeavors, he was a prolific writer who wrote and translated several enlightening books and papers on medicine, which included tuberculosis, the history of medicine and Iran's contemporary history. Amongst his many publications is a book, "History of Tuberculosis" published in 1984, which is very informative.<sup>3</sup> His book, "Noble Prize Winners in Physiology or Medicine" (now in its third edition) was published in 2000 by the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences.<sup>4</sup> Ad-

ditionally, he published his memoirs in his affable autobiography, "The Story of Life" in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

After the tragedy of the Manjil-Rudbar earthquake in Gilan Province on June 21, 1990 that incurred around 40,000 fatalities, Dr. Zia Zarifi and his friends, as a humanitarian deed, provided life-time aid to 150 earthquake survivors, which included financial support to over 40 children and enabled them to continue their education.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Zia Zarifi was influential in establishing a scientific foundation known as the Zirakzadeh Science Foundation in honor of the late Ahmad Zirakzadeh (former professor of Literature at Tehran University) to offer science education to needy children.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Dr. Zia Zarifi who spend over fifty years in the battle against TB passed away of cancer on October 4, 2010 in America.

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