



Dr. Abdulkarim Vessal (1933-2022): A Pioneering Professor of Radiology at Shiraz Medical School, Iran

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Dr. Abdulkarim Vessal was a distinguished professor of the Shiraz Medical School in south of Iran. He was born in 1933 in Shiraz. After finishing primary and high schools, he went to Germany and entered the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in 1957, where he studied medicine and received his MD degree (Figures 1 and 2) (1).

In due course, since he was highly interested in basic science, he studied physics at the Berlin School of Science and Philosophy up to 1961 and then continued his medical training in radiology at the Berlin University and in 1965, he obtained the board certificate and practiced for few years in Germany and England and finally he returned home. In Shiraz, Dr. Vessal joined the Shiraz School of Medicine as an Associate Professor and became the Head of Radiology Department. Later, he went to the USA and continued his training in radiology at the Johns Hopkins Radiology Department as well as Vanderbilt University (1).

Dr. Vessal became Professor of Radiology in 1976, a duty that continued for 40 years. He attended several international and local scientific meetings and delivered remarkable lectures (Figure 3). He was a member of Radiology Board Examination. In addition to his educational and research efforts, Dr. Vessal wrote 46 English papers in sound medical journals which are available at the PubMed database. He together with Dr. Reza Habibian also authored the first comprehensive Persian textbook on nuclear medicine, which was published by Shiraz University Press in 1976 (2).

Dr. Vessal was highly interested in academic medical journalism and he founded an English medical journal in Shiraz University Medical School in 1970 which was indexed in Index Medicus. He was the editor in chief of the journal. The current title of Journal is "Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences". Since that time, he was a true supporter of medical journalism in Iran and he was influential as an active editor, a peer reviewer or author (2).

For his fruitful academic life in 1992, Dr. Vessal was selected as a permanent member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Iran. Six years later in 1998, he and his colleagues established an English international journal entitled the "Archives of Iranian Medicine"

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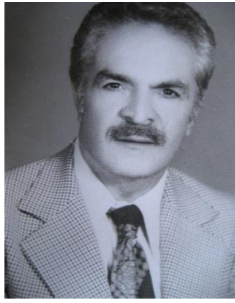


Figure 1. Professor Abdulkarim Vessal.

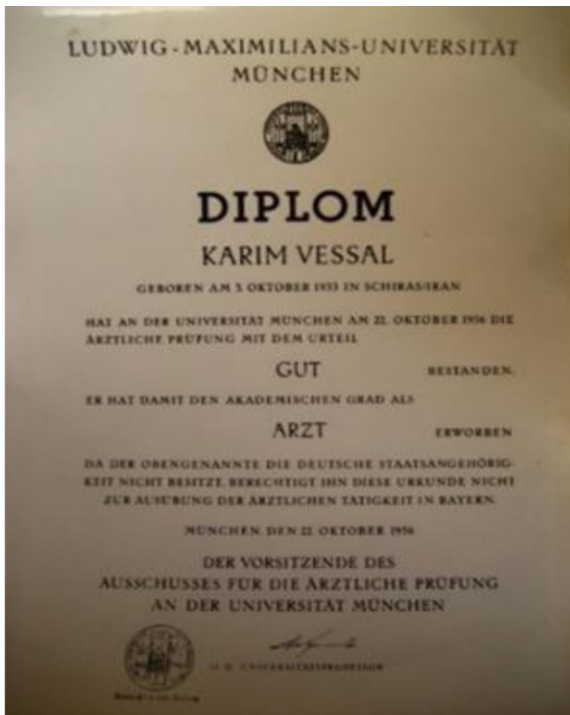


Figure 2. Dr. Vessal's MD degree from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany, 1957.

affiliated to “the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences”. The third medical periodical was founded by Dr. Vessal in 2003 named the “Iranian Journal of Radiology” affiliated to the Tehran University of Medical Sciences (recently from volume 20, issue 1 it publishes under the new title: “Innovative Journal of Radiology”).

Dr. Vessal and his co-authors wrote the history of development of radiology in Iran in a review article which is very informative. According to their study, the history of radiology in Iran dates back to 94 years ago when Professor Mahmud Hessabi (1903-1992), a French-trained scientist and engineer with interest in X-ray physics tried to put together the first experimental machine in 1929. His brother, Dr. Mohammad Hessabi, was also a French-trained clinical radiologist who was the first trained radiologist in Iran. In addition, Dr. Bonakdarpour was the first US-trained Iranian radiologist to join the combined radiology-radiotherapy department at the Tehran University in 1958 and served there until 1963. The major development of radiology in 1970 was the beginning of the residency program in Iran. The residency program was expanded to four years starting in 2004 and fellowship courses were approved for major training centers with emphasis on interventional radiology. In Iran, the first nuclear medicine facilities were installed at the Nemazi Hospital of Shiraz as a section of the Department of Radiology and later in the Shariati Hospital of Tehran” (3).

Dr. Vessal was a scientist who enjoyed reading and



Figure 3. Professor Dr. Vessal (first on the left), at Nuclear Medicine Scientists Meeting of Nine Asian Countries, Philippines, November 15, 1971 (3).

writing, particularly regarding scientific subjects, literary and historical works. He believed that science and culture can be advanced by the publication of well-written papers and books. He knew English, German, and French languages very well as well as being familiar with Latin and Greek. He received several awards including the gold medal of Iranian Congress of Radiology in 2009 and the first rank national medal of science in 2011. Dr. Vessal also received this award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to medical science progress in Iran. In 2015, Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) organized its conference in Shiraz in which several medical editors including Dr. Vessal was honored as “Distinguished Editor” from the region (2).

Finally, after a period of illness, he passed away in Shiraz in the evening of February 18, 2022 and two days later was buried in his family tomb, near Hafez Tomb in Shiraz.

But what was the secret of Professor Vessal’s success? In 1945, not long after cessation of World War II hostilities, there was a meeting of many visionaries gathered in Paris and two important proclamations were issued: 1) The underlying cause of First and Second World Wars of the Twentieth Century was announced to have been “Colonialism”, and 2) All nations in the world were arbitrarily categorized into one of three types:

- A) The “First World”, made up of technologically advanced and rich countries,
- B) The “Second World” composed of Communist countries, and
- C) The “Third World” consisting of poor, benevolently named developing countries.

It must have occurred to some people that dividing nations into those three “Types” might, in due course but irrevocably, lead to “Colonialism” and eventually by some force of human nature to future World Wars. Quite fortunately, another variant of human nature has forced itself into the picture.

People of “Third World” and also remarkably “Second World” have become anxious to reach “First World” status. This has resulted in all young people of “Third” and “Second” World countries anxious to study in “First World” universities. Who knows if this is not the only choice for mankind to avoid

“Doomsday”? The hopes of all people in the World to become citizens of “First World Countries” may in fact be their only “Salvation”.

On the basis of those two 1945 Paris proclamations, all “Third” as well as “Second World” countries are anxious to have their students’ study in “First World Countries”.

What has not been fully realized as yet, is that equalization of countries at “First World” Rank, should not only be primarily in the sciences, but also in the cultural spheres, for the simple reason that “Science”, as understood today, has its own “Culture”. Such equalization could only be possible through equalizing the “educational” and “cultural” differences between the three “Worlds”!

Enough time has elapsed for enough students of “Third” and also “Second World” countries to have passed through “First World” countries’ higher educational institutions and upon returning home accomplished what is expected of them. What a wonderful opportunity now for armies of sociologist, psychologists, educators and academicians, and of course executive, industrialists and statesmen, and remarkably even novelists, to study and express their critical as well as constructive views.

It has been recognized, however, that the whole endeavor may backfire, and has been called “Brain Drain” when a “First World” trained scientist, does not return home, or occasionally does not perform what is expected of him or her, or when those scientists who already exist, decide to emigrate permanently. And occasionally, the returnee is somehow a misfit. But does not go back soon enough to where he was trained! Then there have been cases where returnees experience mistreatment by the very establishment within their own native country, to the point of the well-intentioned returnee not having any alternative but to go back to the “First World” where he or she was trained!

In short, the transformation of young people within “Second” and “Third World” countries to “First World Country” status depends very much on the character and culture of those individuals plus the establishments within their societies. Jealousy and innate fear of being replaced by better educated countrymen is a powerful cultural deterrence to development of “Third World” countries.

The most important behavioral features required of young people of “Second” and “Third World Countries” likely to be sent to “First World Countries” is the combination of personal character, motivation, humility, strong patriotism and a general ‘Weltanschauung’. In this respect, Professor Karim Vessal of Shiraz University presented the perfect example of a perfect choice given the perfect opportunity to carry out his mission in a most perfect manner.

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