

## Editorial

# In Memoriam - Dr Nael Ahmed Al-Naqeeb\* (1937 – 2004)

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On January 30, 2004 the medical community in Kuwait lost a dear friend and colleague, Dr Nael Ahmed Al-Naqeeb, MBBCh, FRCS (Edin). He was a skilled surgeon who excelled in clinical practice, diagnostic acuity and administrative prowess, and a man whose vision contributed greatly to the establishment of the very high standard of health care services we now enjoy in Kuwait. He will long be remembered for his unexcelled loyalty and dedication to the State of Kuwait in general, and to the Ministry of Health in particular.

He was born in 1937, the second of five sons of Ahmed Sayid Talib Al-Naqeeb who, having received his commission as a military officer from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst UK, was appointed Director of Customs in Basrah, Iraq. Dr Nael spent his childhood in Basrah where he attended the Al-Ashaar Secondary School which, in the 1950's, was considered equivalent to the British Public School, Eton. He went on to study medicine at the University of Baghdad, graduating in 1960. Soon after graduation, Dr Nael decided to make surgery his career and in 1969 he obtained his surgical fellowship (FRCS) from Edinburgh. After working in Basrah for 3 years as part of his residency program, he moved to Kuwait and married his cousin Souad Al-Rafae, to whom he was a devoted and attentive husband throughout their very happy marriage.

Dr Nael developed an early interest in head and neck surgery and went to London in 1972 to train in head and neck cancer surgery at the Royal Marsden, Westminster and St George's hospitals. On his return to Kuwait he was soon promoted to head the Department of Surgery at the Amiri Hospital in 1977. In a firm and gentle manner he ran a very efficient surgical unit there. Dr Nael was eminently approachable and kind and his was the opinion local doctors sought, not only for their patients but also for their families and friends. As a consultant he worked with great skill, kindness and total reliability in dealing with different surgical

problems. He had a wide surgical repertoire with head and neck surgery as his major interest.

In 1978 he took a further course in reconstructive head and neck surgery at the University Medical Centre in Ljubljana (former Yugoslavia). In 1981, he was appointed Chairman of the Head and Neck Surgical Unit at the Mubarak Hospital in Kuwait and a year later he chaired the Department of Surgery at the Kuwait Cancer Control Centre (KCCC). Perhaps his most valuable contribution to the medical services in Kuwait was to establish an oncological surgical unit at the KCCC. During a ten-year period at the Cancer Centre he was the most active surgeon there. He worked extremely hard and would often return to the Cancer Centre to operate on and take care of his patients after finishing his administrative duties at the ministry.

His interest in teaching and research led him to join the Faculty of Medicine at Kuwait University as an Associate Professor of Surgery in 1976. He was a lecturer for the final FRCS courses that were held in Kuwait for the Edinburgh Royal College of Surgeons and a clinical tutor in the medical school. Dr Nael published a large number of papers, most of them on head and neck tumours. An article reporting his results on 15 years' experience of parotid tumours, published in the Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh is now considered a classic and a landmark in this field. His extensive experience in head and neck surgery helped him to publish articles on thyroid, parotid salivary glands, posterior cricoid carcinoma and tumours of the oral cavity.

His administrative accomplishments are also well known. He served as Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Health in 1976 for a year preceding his appointment as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Health. He prepared for this position by taking a course in Health System Management in Harvard, USA. As an administrator in the Ministry of Health, he was

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widely respected for his ability to recognise and effectively manage the important issues, and for the fair and supportive way in which he interacted with all those he dealt with. He was a great believer in interdisciplinary collaboration as a means of achieving high standards of care.

In January 2001, Dr Nael joined the Kuwait Medical Journal as Editor-in-Chief, a responsibility he exercised with his customary diligence and enthusiasm. His enlightened leadership will be sadly missed by all the members of the Editorial Board.

Dr Nael was a colourful character, full of wit and charm. Underneath his ebullient self confidence there was a gentle, kind and intellectual man who loved life and people, entirely without grandeur or pomposity, despite his standing and achievements. He encouraged, cajoled and persuaded his colleagues to work hard, to continue learning and to develop their skills, but particularly to work together. He encouraged multidisciplinary teams before the jargon existed. He pulled everybody together and created a family type of unit at the old Amiri Hospital for which he was admired and respected by all.

He was an exceptional person combining kindness, fun, resourcefulness, intelligence and goodness. He loved life and lived it to the full. Distinguished in bearing and manner, he left a legacy of professionalism, patience, kindness and devotion to his patients and his family, which his

colleagues will always remember with gratitude. His serious looks belied a youthful, sparkling sense of humour. He was a popular and well-respected colleague with a legendary sense of fun. The doctors he helped to train, nurses and theatre staff alike, all fondly recall his jokes and stories which enlivened his operating sessions. Technically, Dr Nael had excellent surgical skills. He was a brilliant, magnanimous man who inspired many with his energy, enthusiasm and wit.

He will be remembered with affection by many patients and especially by his colleagues. A sociable man, he was direct and forthright in manner. His patients knew they could trust him and his colleagues could count on his loyalty, commitment and unfailing integrity. To all who knew him, however, it was clear that the central focus of his life was always his family. Throughout his busy surgical and administrative career he was always able to balance his professional interests and responsibilities with his devotion and dedication to his dear wife, their three children and seven grandchildren. His favourite time was on Fridays when they all gathered together for lunch, just as they did on the day before he died.

Dr Nael was a skilful and caring doctor, a quintessential gentleman, a faithful friend, a loving father and a devoted husband. Farewell my friend, you have left an enviable legacy for which you will always be remembered.