

TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR DR. MOHAMED AZMI BIN AHMAD HASSALI: A GREAT SCHOLAR, GENEROUS COLLEAGUE, FRIENDLY AND INSPIRATIONAL MENTOR

OOI GUAT SEE^{1*}, DAVID CM KONG^{2,3}, CHUA GIN NIE⁴, FAHAD SALEEM⁵, TAN CHING SIANG⁶, WONG YUET YEN⁷, ASRUL AKMAL SHAFIE⁸ AND ONG SIEW CHIN⁸

¹Discipline of Clinical Pharmacy, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

²Centre for Medicine Use and Safety, Monash Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Monash University, Victoria, Australia

³Pharmacy Department, Ballarat Health Services, Victoria, Australia

⁴Acaster Lloyd Consulting Ltd, London, United Kingdom

⁵Faculty of Pharmacy & Health Sciences, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan

⁶School of Pharmacy, KPJ Healthcare University College, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

⁷Faculty of Pharmacy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Bertam Campus, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

⁸Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

We were all born to do something great. We were all born with a purpose. In between birth and death, there lies a path that life paves for us; a path that we must fill with something that gives our lives meaning. Perhaps it sounds clichéd, but it is true with Professor Azmi. Professor Azmi was different; he was inimitable. He was a benchmark for the youth and an emblem for his colleagues. He was always eager to lead the way but also had the nerves to follow his peers, colleagues and even his students.

Professor Dr. Mohamed Azmi Ahmad Hassali passed away on 16 July 2021. This was truly a great loss to the profession of pharmacy, which lost one of its key intellectual leaders.

Professor Dr. Mohamed Azmi Ahmad Hassali was born on the 19 February 1974 in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in pharmacy from Universiti Sains Malaysia in the year 1998, followed soon after with a Master's degree in the field of clinical pharmacy from the same university in 2001, consequently earning his PhD at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia in 2006.

*Corresponding authors: guatsee.ooi@usm.my, yuetyen@uitm.edu.my



Professor Dr Mohamed Azmi
Ahmad Hassali
1974 - 2021

Professionally, Professor Azmi was one of the leaders in the field of social and administrative pharmacy. He obtained his professorship in 2014 at the age of 40. This would be a tribute to Professor Azmi to remember him as a great scholar, generous colleague, friendly and inspirational mentor for students. Through the memories, it is hoped that we could learn the lessons inspired by him following his one-year passed on.

A Scholar

Professor Azmi began his scholar journey by undertaking his PhD studies under the supervision of Dr. David Kong and Associate Professor Dr. Kay Stewart, exploring the use of generic medicines. During his time at Monash University, Dr. David Kong remarked that “Azmi took every opportunity to establish a strong academic network. He was always willing to listen, reflect, adapt and grow (both intellectually and as a person). Challenges that came ‘his way’ was addressed appropriately and, ‘quality’ was always transparent in all that Azmi did.”

As a strong believer of change coupled with inquisitive mind and intellect for research, Professor Azmi was always geared up to take on new challenges. Indeed, these ‘traits’ have contributed to his successes both as a person and professionally. He had successfully published over 600 articles in international peer-reviewed journals and authored over 250 conference presentations. His name was recorded in the Malaysia Book of Records (MBR) for ‘Most Number of Medical Research Journals Published’ in 2017 (Md. Zain and Tan 2017).

A Colleague

Professor Azmi’s emphasis on collaborative and networking which cultivated during his PhD candidature continued during his academic career. As Professor Dr. Asrul, who is

currently a professor and the director of Institutional Planning & Strategic Centre (IPSC) in USM recalled “As a colleague, Prof. Azmi’s generosity was boundless. His wisdom was far reaching. He generously shared any projects, supervisions, workshops and life experiences that facilitates my career progression to this day. There was always a new venture that he was hatching and I had benefitted from them in many ways.” Another former colleague, now an associate professor at University of Balochistan, Dr. Fahad Saleem commented “One of his key attributes was his ability to develop strong rapport with people and to connect with people around him. His superb networking skills has the magic touch to soften the hardest soul.”

A Mentor

Professor Azmi’s love of teaching did not preclude explaining the ‘why’ of things. He saw his students and colleagues as individual thinking human beings who deserved to be listened to and heard, not merely receptacles to be filled. As a result, they learned much more than they might otherwise have done. As Gin Nie Chua, a former master student, remarked that “Professor Azmi consistently saw potential in his students and their work even when we ourselves had doubts carrying an idea through.” Professor Azmi was therefore named as the ‘Great Guru’ by all his students, many of which are now scattered far and wide across the world.

Professor Azmi’s caring, diligent but humble supervisorship were the key ingredients to cruise through the ebb and flow of many postgraduates’ candidature and the journey of thesis submission. Former PhD student, Dr. Tan Ching Siang, now a dean at KPJ Healthcare University College clearly remembered “Professor Azmi’s inspired me along the academic journey that he coached me to transform from a community pharmacist to a skillful academic pharmacist. He was a diligent supervisor that he always replied to my emails promptly even though in the midnight.”

Another former PhD student, now a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Pharmacy, UiTM Pulau Pinang branch remarked Professor Azmi as an inspirational mentor as she recalled. “The most memorable statement that Professor Azmi mentioned when I first sat down with him discussing on the scope of my PhD work was that healthcare needs to go beyond institution. His passionate in empowering the low-income community dwellers in the proper management of non-communicable diseases had great influence in my subsequent work that we successfully rolled out several community-based diabetes and hypertension self-management education programmes in the state of Pulau Pinang. By leveraging on Professor Azmi’s powerful networking with the local non-governmental organisations, we strived to improve the local community dwellers’ knowledge and skills in managing their own diseases. I wish to follow suit Professor Azmi’s inspiration in reaching out the communities in need and that healthcare should go beyond institution.”

“Some people come into our lives, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same” - Unknown.

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