

## In Memoriam: Professor Hassan Farsam (1932-2016), Eminent Teacher and Pharmacist

Hassan Farsam, a renowned professor of Tehran University, passed away on 5th February 2016 in Tehran. He trained several generations of Iranian pharmacy students for more than half a century, and will always be remembered for his compassion and his contribution to pharmacy education in Iran.

Farsam was born on 27th September 1932 in Tehran. He was fond of literature and history, and took lessons from the late Jalal Al-e-Ahmad in literature at Sharaf high school (1). His parents persuaded him to study engineering at university, instead of literature. He initially applied to study engineering, but had to resit the exam due to an unforeseen event. He then sat for a diploma in natural sciences and enrolled to study pharmacy at Tehran University in 1952.

After graduating from the Faculty of Pharmacy in 1957, Farsam joined the Institute of Public Health Research to study Malariology. This course was followed by an internship in Susa, in South East Iran. This period had a profound effect on his life. He came across underdeveloped villages plagued by poverty and illness. Many of the villagers suffered from infectious and parasitic diseases that could have been prevented. He learned about bilharziasis (schistosomiasis), malaria and, most importantly, how a lack of education and health care affects the lives of people. He continued to work as a malariologist in Khorramshahr and Malayer.

A typical job for a pharmacy graduate in the 1950s was either working in a pharmacy or in a diagnostic laboratory. Farsam completed a course to work as a diagnostic laboratory specialist, but was invited to join the Department of Biochemistry and Inorganic Chemistry (Tehran University) as post-graduate assistant. He joined the faculty as assistant professor and moved to Paris for sabbatical studies in 1964. He stayed in Paris for two years working on the chemistry of selenium.

He became Dean of Education and then professor of Medical Chemistry at the Faculty of Pharmacy in 1977. As the Dean, he was very well respected and popular due to his compassionate and reasonable

approach to solving students' problems and promoting education. He persuaded his students to travel and visit remote villages in Iran. He thought that students ought to know about their country and the diversity of its culture. He accompanied the students on those trips, and wanted them to be aware of the fact that their free education is provided by all and each of the Iranian people, whose hope for a better future lies in their hands.

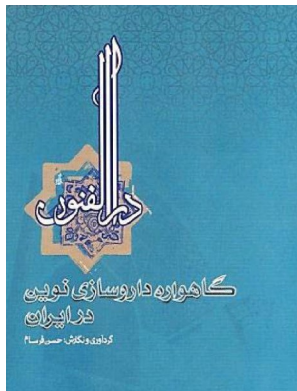
Professor Farsam was eventually appointed as Head of the Faculty of Pharmacy in 1979. He provided a major contribution towards the development of academic pharmacies in Iran. Before this time, Tehran University did not have any affiliated pharmacies, and students had to join independent pharmacies for internship. The quality of these internships varied and it was necessary to launch an organised internship programme for these pharmacy students. Professor Farsam entered into negotiations with the Ministry of Health and the Iranian Society of Pharmacists to establish five affiliated university pharmacies. His efforts were fruitful and led to the establishment of "13-Aban" and "Taleghani" pharmacies in central and northern Tehran, respectively. This development had a major effect in the quality of pharmacy education in Tehran and, later on, in other cities in Iran.

Farsam had a background in public health. He used his profound knowledge in chemistry to solve public health challenges of the Iranian population. He collaborated with Professor Abolhassan Nadim (Institute of Public Health Research) to study lead poisoning in Iran (2). He established a centre for the measurement of lead in biological samples at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Tehran University. His other research areas were in chemistry and the ethnopharmacology of medicinal plants.

Farsam travelled to the United States in 1988 to join a research group at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). He worked on morphine derivatives and chromatography of organic molecules (3). On his return to Tehran, his team used High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) for quantification of drugs in biological samples. After

retirement in 2002, he continued working at Tehran University as emeritus professor and director of the Museum of History of Medicine (Tehran University of Medical Sciences).

Professor Farsam was a permanent member of the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences, an editorial member of *Acta Medica Iranica*, as well as advisor to the World Health Organization (WHO) in Traditional Medicine and Medicinal Plants (4). In the last decade of his life, he gathered historical documents on the evolution of pharmacy in Iran. These documents were published as a book on the history of pharmacy in 2015 (5) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Darolfonon, the birthplace of modern pharmacy in Iran The latest book published by Professor Farsam in 2015

Professor Farsam was a modest man who had profound effects on the new generation of Iranian pharmacists. He knew very well the culture of Iran

and wanted to promote ethics in medical practice and research (6). He believed that the public should benefit from scientific investigations carried out in universities. He witnessed the transition of pharmaceutical sciences from traditional pharmacy to nanomedicine, and connected our generation to the passionate founders of the Faculty of Pharmacy. He leaves behind a rich legacy of passion for science and training motivated students. Nevertheless, most importantly, he leaves behind a legacy of ethics and humanity.

## References

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