

The birth and evolution of Otorhinolaryngology in Cairo University: decades of leadership

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Interview with Professor Dr Iskandar Habib: by Aya raouf Sheikhan, MD

On a sunny spring day, I had the pleasure of visiting Dr Iskandar Habib and conducting the most exciting and informative interview with one of our mentors. It was a fruitful experience both personally and professionally that I hoped to share with you all.

Iskandar Habib in a few words

Iskandar Habib, born in November 1926, graduated from the faculty of medicine in 1949, finished his Medical doctorate degree in ENT in 1957, and became a lecturer in 1958. He pursued his career in the ENT department until he became a professor in 1976; he retired 10 years later in 1986.

Residency program decades ago (1950s)

Professor Habib spent 2 years of residency in the ENT department, Kasr El Ainy Hospital. He was the only resident in charge of two units of ENT (210 beds) for 18 months of his residency. He was the sole emergency ENT resident during this time with an on-call duty of 24 h for the entire duration of the 18 months.

His professor and supervisor at the time was Professor Dr Handoussa, who was the first to implement the residency programs and residency training courses. Professor Handoussa had an ongoing clinical, oral, operative, and theoretical program for all residents to complete their training. An excellent filing system for ear, nose, and throat cases was set up in separate cupboards. A well-established documentation system was set up for each patient preoperatively, intraoperatively, and postoperatively.

The residency program was quite a learning experience, after which residents received a diploma in ENT and general surgery and were fit to practice ENT on their own.

Evolution in ENT over the years

On asking Professor Habib about the evolutions he noticed in ENT over the years, he remarked on the great advancements in endoscopy and microscopy in the field of ENT. The introduction of microscopes in Otolaryngology and

Endoscopes in Rhinology and Laryngology led to a revolution in the field of ENT.

Professor Habib also commented on the advancement in information technology systems and networking, which facilitated the access to references and scientific researches all over the world.

Specialization in the field of ENT: are you with or against?

Professor Habib reflected on specialization in ENT as being 'Great' thanks to Professor Dr Reda Kamel, who pioneered specialization in the field of Rhinology and Endoscopy that paved the way for further specialization in other fields.

When asked about going back in time and making his choice of specialization, which speciality would he have chosen? Professor Habib chose Otolaryngology as he finds great pride in his research in the field of Preservation of Stapedius Tendon in Stapes surgery. This research was published in the *Journal of Laryngology and Otolaryngology* in 1966.

Research and international publications

Professor Habib emphasized on the importance of research and documentation of research through publication both nationally and internationally.

Over the years, Professor Habib has published 17 original research articles in the *Journal of Laryngology and Otolaryngology* and five original research articles in the Egyptian medical journal.

Professor Habib stated that research and publications are of crucial importance to all generations. It provides a chance for their researchers to develop researches, their sciences and abilities to serve their patients and community.

Previous researches and publications are considered as references that add on to the experiences of researchers and junior doctors who help in the management of diseases.

Who are professor Habib's mentors?

Professor Handoussa, a man of science and a great idol and mentor to all junior and senior staff members,

developed the spirit of research and importance of publications in all his staff.

Professor Hosny Farid, the loving father of all younger generation in the ENT department with a great personality who was loved by everyone.

Professor Adly Yassin, Great Chairman of the ENT department, who encouraged all staff members to develop both as surgeons and as researchers.

Professor Murad Ghaleb, who started as an ENT resident, became an ambassador, until he became Egypt's minister of Foreign affairs years later, a great example of humanity, intelligence, and excellent communication skills.

Personal request and last thoughts

Professor Habib requested that the retirement age be set as 70 years instead of 60 years as given the excellent health services, surgeons and academic professors can work efficiently till the age of 70 years. This will provide the professors a chance to share their experiences and clinical knowledge with the younger generations.

Advice to junior ENT staff

Professor Habib's advice to junior staff is to that they should gain as much experience as much as possible with

a large number of patients with a wide variety of diagnoses and management plans. He also advises them to read as many books as they can access from all countries and in all specialities to widen their scope of interests and experiences.

Professor Habib also advises junior staff to attend conferences and to present in national and international conferences. This will provide them with a chance for personal as well as professional development of their communication and presentation skills.

Take-home message to EJO readers

Education is the basis of development of all countries over the years. The better the quality of the educational system, the more developed the nations become.

Professor Habib's journey through the years is an ongoing process of learning and development 'A journey of perseverance and hard work'.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.