

Poem: My Mother

Saher Lalani¹

The memories of my mother,
are stored in an examination room
with patients snaked
in a lengthy queue.

Just as a **sufi* surrenders sleep,
she geared up at nightfall
in a white coat
marching through
the hallways of
Aga Khan Hospital's Pediatric ward.

Like a hawk, sharp-eyed
with strong instincts,
she thoroughly examined
in preparation for
her next graceful act.

From the ocean within,
she drew love and compassion,
pouring comfort and healing
upon innocent little bodies.

Commentary:

My mother, Dr Fatima Hashamali, MBBS, DCH, MCPS, was a pediatrician who lived her life serving some of the world's poorest children in Kenya, Tanzania, and Pakistan.

My mother grew up in Pakistan in a simple household where values of faith, compassion, and service were ingrained in her from childhood. In the 1980's, she was recruited by Aga Khan Health Services, East Africa, to work in Kenya. Deeply moved by the work of the institution and the dire need for a female physician for children in East Africa, she moved from her homeland, first to Kenya and then later to Tanzania. She worked at the Aga Khan Hospitals in Kisumu and Mwanza.

The majority of my mother's patients were critically ill and destitute children from surrounding villages. In many cases, they traveled for days under arduous circumstances to receive

treatment. She also served on the Aga Khan Health Board as the community physician conducting free clinics and health awareness seminars.

After nearly two decades in East Africa, she took a hiatus and relocated to Pakistan. As a senior pediatric consultant and lecturer, she was affiliated with multiple institutions and charities. Notably, she joined The Indus Hospital (TIH), an oasis of cost-free, quality healthcare established to serve disadvantaged communities in Karachi. She served TIH for over half a decade and also conducted low cost, charity clinics serving the ultra-poor in Karachi.

Dr Farhana Amanullah, a pediatric nephrologist and colleague at TIH recounts, "Dr Fatima was one of the first pediatricians to join TIH's filter clinic. She played a key role in establishing its pediatric services and in the Johns Hopkins child pneumonia

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**Sufi*: A Muslim ascetic and mystic.

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Left image: A joyful Dr. Fatima holding a patient in Karachi, Pakistan.

Right image: Dr. Fatima examines a neonate in the pediatric ward of Aga Khan Hospital in Kisumu, Kenya.

research project. She was an experienced pediatrician to whom patients and families got attached, given her engaging demeanor, good bedside manner, confident and accurate diagnosis and counseling skills. She is affectionately remembered by colleagues for her intellectual and clinical acumen, hardworking spirit and her desire to see every child reach full recovery.”

Grounded in faith, my mother viewed her profession as a medium to channel healing and love to the sick and poor

children of the world. In January 2017, she passed away peacefully after a short battle with cancer. Dr Faiza Herekar, an ER pediatrician and colleague at TIH reminisces, “Dr Fatima was a veteran pediatrician with rich clinical experience. Her absence is deeply felt by the ultra-poor residents of Karachi, whom she served. She is dearly missed for her healing hands, loving heart and her beautiful smile.”