

Two Stories, Two Paths: from clinic to library
by Omid Zargari

It is said that there should be boundaries between doctors and patients. But, where should these boundaries be?

I am among those who don't keep strict boundaries. As a dermatologist, I believe that there are many factors outside of the body that have an influence on our patients' dermatological problems. To know these, sometimes we need to know more about our patients and sometimes we even need to share some of our personal stories. Here, I would like to share two vignettes from my practice.

During years of my practice, I have noticed that when patients find that you have the same taste for music, literature, art and so on, it helps them much more than the pills or creams that you give them. And for this reason I always tell my colleagues that reading novels or poetry, listening music, going to art galleries and museums are as important as reading textbooks or attending scientific meetings.

Years ago, a young girl came to my office with generalized psoriasis. She was also has some other issues. In the first look, I could guess that her skin problem would not respond to methotrexate nor to biologics. Frankly, she had tried them before. I noticed a book in her hands, and tried to talk about the books I had recently read. In the next visit, I recommended some books to her and especially recommended her to read the writings of John Updike (because as we know, he also had psoriasis and his disease is well-reflected in his writings).

A few months later, she came to my office with a magazine having one of Updike's stories translated by none other than herself! To shorten this story; some months ago, before I left Iran to come to Canada, that young girl who is now a successful translator and free of all of her medical problems, invited me to her book-launching day; a translation of Nizar Qabani's poetry.

In the blue harbor of your eyes
Is an open sea window,
And birds appear in the distance
Searching for islands still unborn.

The second event is about the stories of the diseases. Skin cancers as you can imagine are rarer in Iran in comparison with the West. Many of the cases of skin cancers I see in my office, are those who have had radiotherapy in their childhood for treating their tinea capitis. In my search to find where this radiotherapy had been taking place, I found that many of them had received radiotherapy in an American Hospital in Rasht.

The American Presbyterian mission started its mission in Guilan in 1905 and the American Christian Hospital that was founded by this group was among the first

hospitals founded in Northern Iran circa 1917 and maybe the first hospital with X-ray facility. The major figure in this hospital was Dr. John Davidson Frame (1880-1942) who established the hospital and worked as a physician and surgeon in Rasht for about 37 years.

To get more information about this hospital, I did a search and found a book written by Dr. Frame's daughter; Margaret Frame. This book may not be of value from a literary perspective, but it opens a window for those who wish to know more about Iran and its history.

Ergo, office work should not be viewed solely as a platform for hastily visiting patients as one expects but it should also be viewed as an opportunity for embracing the world around us.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

Reference:

Omid Zargai. Radiation-induced basal cell carcinoma. *Dermatol Pract Concept* 2015;5(2):22;109

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