

Why Medical Journals in Developing Countries Have No Obituary Pages?

CONTEXT

“Obituary” is defined as a news article that reports the recent death of a person, typically along with an account of the person’s life and information about the upcoming funeral.^[1] In large cities and larger newspapers, obituaries are written only for people considered significant, and in local newspapers, an obituary may be published for any local resident upon death. There are various types of obituaries. The type that concerns us in this context is the medical type of obituaries.

MEDICAL OBITUARIES

Obituaries feature regularly in many medical journals. They reflect on the person’s life and influence on the history of the world or the profession. The British Medical Journal, for instance, has a long-lasting tradition of publishing obituaries on physicians who lived and practiced for significant part of their career in the British Isles.

I used to check these pages during my 20 years in the UK. On several occasions, the individuals were known to me personally and only by reading their obituary, I would have been able to learn about their passing away. I came to learn about the death of Mohamed Ben Hamza in Permuda; he taught me in ophthalmology as a student in Tripoli. Manjit Shahi, a cardiologist in reading, did the cardiac assessments for my adult hypopituitarism studies at St Mary’s Hospital. Ivo Drury, handed me my MRCPI diploma in Dublin. His words, “*by the powers vested in me as a president, I hereby admit you as a licentiate and a member of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, Congratulations,*” are still ringing in my ears. Sometimes, only by reading an obituary, one can learn that a person is actually more contemporary than thought such as when I looked up Harold Leeming Sheehan after whom the postpartum hypopituitarism was named as “Sheehan’s Syndrome; many would not have thought that he lived till 1988.

OBITUARIES IN DEVELOPING REGIONS

I have been in the editorial team of this *journal* for nearly a decade. I do not recall receiving any request for publication of an obituary. Indeed, I still remember when I wanted to “commission” an obituary to be written on Dr Abu Baker Al Mansouri, a Tripoli-based cardiologist who practiced and taught many students and trained many juniors and dedicated over 20 years of his life to this cause, I could

not get somebody who is capable and willing to produce a decent obituary perhaps due to lack of experience or lack of appreciation of the value of an obituary. While working with the organizing team for The Libyan Congress for Diabetes and Endocrinology (between 2005 and 2010), we created annual “Memorial Lectures” to celebrate the life and work of those who contributed to health care and medical education. The hardest part was to find adequate information for the speakers to incorporate in their lectures as none of them had a formal obituary.

I have turned to the pages of many other medical journals based in several developing countries to see if any has been publishing obituaries. This confirmed my suspicion and I could not find any pages dedicated for obituaries.

Personally, I think writing an obituary provides colleagues and friends an opportunity to pay tribute and reflect on an individual’s contributions to health care and medical life in a subject or locality. Perhaps it is a cultural issue as people may feel that the duties of the living toward the dead are over after prayers and burial. Notwithstanding these obligations, I think it is timely that people are encouraged to write obituaries on their colleagues and friends. In the current issue, Ibnosina is publishing its first obituary.^[2] I trust Ibnosina will have its doors open for obituaries of health-care professions who were substantially associated with the Middle East and Africa where most of its readership is located. Such traditions, not only pay tribute to the lost ones, but also provide an opportunity to document history of medicine and medical practice by examining people, places, and events in a medical context. For a region in turmoil one has to be careful not to allow using obituaries as fighting grounds. Perhaps, adopting the BMJ style at least in the foreseeable future seems very reasonable.^[3]

Author’s contributions

Single author.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Compliance with ethical principles

Not relevant.

Salem A. Beshyah

Institute of Medicine, Sheikh Khalifa Medical City, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Address for correspondence: Dr. Salem A. Beshyah,
Center for Diabetes and Endocrinology,
Institute of Medicine,
Sheikh Khalifa Medical City, Abu Dhabi, UAE.
E-mail: beshyah@yahoo.com

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

REFERENCES

1. Obituary. Available from: <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obituary>. [Last accessed on 2018 May 19].
2. Elkhammas EA. In memoriam: Bashir Allaghi (1951-2018). *Ibnosina J Med Biomed Sci* 2018;10:102.
3. Lock S. Write an obituary for the BMJ. *BMJ*. 1995 Sep 9;311(7006):680-1.

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:

www.ijmbs.org

DOI:

10.4103/ijmbs.ijmbs_35_18

How to cite this article: Beshyah SA. Why medical journals in developing countries have no obituary pages?. *Ibnosina J Med Biomed Sci* 2018;10:71-2.

Reviewers:
None (Solicited)

Editors:
Elmahdi Elkhammas (Columbus, Ohio, USA)
Amna Salhin (San Antonio, Texas, USA)