



Avedis Donabedian

7 January 1919–9 November 2000

The President, Executive Board, Members and Friends of The International Society for Quality in Health Care and the Editors of the Society's Journal, honour the distinguished life and acclaimed contributions of **Avedis Donabedian**, primary architect of the field of quality in health care and a life Member of ISQua, who died peacefully at his home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA on 9 November 2000.

Avedis Donabedian

Professor Avedis Donabedian was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1919. His parents were Armenians who had left Armenia during the war with Turkey, and he always felt himself to be a member of the Armenian community although he grew up in a small Arabic town in Palestine. He studied at the American University in Beirut, and when the situation in the Middle East after the Second World War became very difficult for people of Armenian origin, he, his wife and their two children went into exile in the United States.

He came in contact with matters of quality through Professor Franz Goldmann at the Harvard School of Public Health and made acquaintance with the top professionals in quality of the time (L. S. Rosenfeld, M. A. Morehead, Paul Lembcke, V. Slee, and others). Shortly after having joined the University of Michigan, Dr. Rosenfeld was commissioned to give Professor Donabedian the task of revising what had been written on Quality Assessment and to present it in an organized way. As Donabedian himself relates in various articles,

‘Since the literature in quality was pretty limited, this allowed me to read almost everything that had been published and make out an index card for each article. When trying to classify them I realised that there was a structure that made it possible to organise them. It took me six months of hard and steadfast work and in the end I was quite unsure that what I had achieved was any good.’

Nevertheless, when he sent the article for publication the publisher immediately realised what he had in his hands and made this comment to him: ‘Man, you’ve written a classic’. The article, published in 1966 in the Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, sets out Professor Donabedian’s famous contribution to the classification of methods for Quality Assessment: structure–process–outcome. This article has been one of the most frequently cited in this century in the field of Public Health and figures in the *Current Contents* group Citation Classics’.

Afterwards, Professor Donabedian dedicated the rest of his professional life to the theoretical advancement of quality improvement and health services research. He published crucial articles on quality definition, on the relationship between process and outcomes, the impact of clinical decisions on quality, the effectiveness of quality programmes, the relationship between quality and cost, the similarities and differences between industrial and health quality models, and many other topics. He wrote 16 books, over 100 articles and prepared a large number of lectures and lessons which can be found in different sources and which have been translated into many languages.

Different initiatives have been set up to carry on his work, such as the Avedis Donabedian Foundation (FAD) in Spain

and Argentina, the Donabedian Library in Italy and Israel, the publication of his works in the Public Health Research Centre in Mexico, and his students are to be found throughout the world. It is FAD’s endeavour to spread the practical applications of Professor Donabedian’s teachings and to collaborate with institutions, professionals and citizens to improve quality, as well as to encourage research and the collaborative work characteristic of Professor Donabedian’s spirit.

Professor Donabedian was also a man of great culture, a poet and a great enthusiast of literature. He was a fluent reader in six languages, a keen Hispanist and an interested reader of medieval Spanish literature as well as a knowledgeable expert on Saint Teresa of Jesus and other classical authors. One of the most delightful memories I have is of observing a discussion between Professor Donabedian and the former Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan about the exact translation of a passage in the Bible. Both over 80 years old, they were sitting on the floor, surrounded by dictionaries and discussing the meaning of the words in Aramaic, ancient Greek, Hebrew and English.

Professor Donabedián (he would prefer the Armenian spelling of his name) was also a profoundly humane man. He never believed in the confrontation of people or scientific trends and his main concern was to create ties of friendship and solidarity among all the different students he had throughout the world and to build bridges of understanding and appreciation among people and countries. So, in his last days, when we knew about the seriousness of his condition, he received daily calls from all over the world to accompany him during the course of his disease. His death has been a profound lesson for all of us who have experienced it close at hand. He knew and discussed all the details of his illness until the last day and he had time to take leave of all of his friends and family members, to put his articles in order and to give encouragement and fondness to all those who surrounded him.

He leaves to be published a manual on quality which he wrote for Armenian professionals, which includes innovative approaches and subjects for future debate as well as basic concepts.

It is not easy to sum up Professor Donabedian’s nature. Perhaps what best explains the way he was are his own words at the end of an article on quality development in the twentieth century, written on the occasion of his eightieth birthday and published in the *Spanish Journal of Health Care Quality* in 1999. ‘I think I have said enough to show how we have progressed and how each one of us is only a link in a chain that began long before us and will continue long after we have gone. Therefore we must honour our

predecessors and delight in those who shall follow. Surely this is the secret of our contentment. And, “What is the secret of quality?” you will ask. Very simple, it is love – love of knowledge, love of man and love of God. Let us live and work accordingly.’

Rosa Suñol
Director, Fundacion Avedis Donabedian
Barcelona, Spain
Special Project Editor, Editorial Committee Member,
International Journal for Quality in Health Care

Autumn And After

It is autumn now; the trees
like peasant brides are
coined in gold;
the sun is golden too. The air
falls silent now the birds
departing as winter peeks.
Come Christmas next,
all coinage spent, whiteness
replacing,
will there be me?

Shaping in me a quiet
jubilation,
a marvelous stillness. I
hear Him whisper
in my ear His precious
secret:
when you feel most
abandoned
I'm most near.

I feel in me a
vast sun rising,
to burn me to a
crisp, or else,
to set me free.

Avedis Donabedian
Ann Arbor
22 October 2000