

Meet the RIAD FAMILY



A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT FATHER AND OPHTHALMOLOGIST

BY RAMY RIAD FIKRY RIAD, MD, PhD, FRCS

I read with interest the All in the Family issue of *CRST Europe* (cover focus, October 2016). I was so moved by the stories of these fathers and their sons and daughters that I wanted the opportunity to share my own.

My father, Riad Fikry Riad, MD, was my only family for much of my life. My mother passed away when I was 7 years old. I had no siblings, and my father never remarried. As I was growing up, my father concentrated on providing suitable schooling and a stable home environment for me (Figure 1A). He had a busy life, but he was always present on weekends and on the other end of the phone on weekdays.

My father had obtained his doctorate in ophthalmology, probably the most challenging degree in Egyptian ophthalmology, in 1986, during the time when he was battling alongside my mother against her serious illness. He had also gained a permanent appointment in Matareyya Teaching Hospital, a government hospital in a densely populated underprivileged area of Cairo.

After my mother passed away in 1988, my father then immersed himself in ophthalmology. This was around the time of the rise of phacoemulsification as the state of the art in cataract surgery. He traveled to Germany to learn about it, returned, and introduced it in Egypt. He overcame the challenges posed by the high costs of machines and instruments

and managed to perfect his own technique and then teach it to his juniors. He was also put in charge of the eye department of Matareyya Teaching Hospital, which, under financial constraints, he renovated, modernized, and transformed into one of the most highly preferred ophthalmic departments in Cairo for training.

FREEING HIM

As for me, when my time came, I joined Cairo University Medical School and graduated in 2004, freeing him, as he would say. I did my residency there, followed by a permanent appointment at Cairo University in 2009. During my medical education, my father was busy founding, with two colleagues, a private eye hospital in Cairo. This is when our professional paths met. He would return home at night and discuss the details of the new hospital with me. It was not surprising, therefore, that I would choose ophthalmology as my own specialty.

My father's ambition was to establish a state-of-the-art hospital. He saw it as a market necessity and a place that would be a haven for both doctors and patients. In 2001, Al Watany Eye Hospital began its operation as a relatively small two-floor section of a building in a busy Cairo street. My father became chief executive officer (CEO) of the hospital.

He undertook numerous scientific activities in the hospital, insisted on strict subspecialty practice—an idea that was novel to the Egyptian market—and drew expertise from all over Cairo to develop and run the new model. He initiated the first ophthalmology residency program in a private



Figure 1. A young Ramy with his father Riad (A).
Ramy and his father Riad in the operating room (B).
Ramy and his father on Ramy's wedding day (C).

hospital in Egypt and started an annual scientific meeting. He was the driving force behind the hospital becoming Egypt's International Chapter Affiliate for the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO-Egypt), and chaired the fledgling chapter for 3 years.

After I finished my specialization in ophthalmology, in addition to my university role, I joined the Al Watany Hospital and also worked with my father in his private practice (Figure 1B). By this time, I was married with two children, and this gave me an opportunity to see my father daily and continue our strong relationship (Figure 1C).

With him at the helm, the hospital's reputation grew, and space became tight. Patients were coming from all over Egypt, and the hospital's catchment area extended beyond Cairo to include Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta. Therefore, with the same partners, my father proceeded to build the biggest standalone private ophthalmic hospital in Egypt. The hospital was built at a time of significant political and socioeconomic unrest in Egypt, but, as usual, my father met all the challenges. Standing on 4,000 m² in the outskirts of Cairo, on the joint route between the city and

its newest suburbs, and on the way to the Suez Canal cities, it is a memorial to him for those who witnessed his utter dedication to it (Figure 2).

LEAVING HIS MARK

My father test-drove the hospital but did not see it in full operation. On a weekend morning in December 2014, days before the hospital was to formally open, and 26 years to the day after my mother's passing, I picked up my father from his home. We were heading to the new hospital to operate together using a new femtosecond laser. One moment we were chatting in the car, and in the next he passed away calmly and silently. He was 63.

My father was replaced as CEO, but I sit on the board of the hospital. There is not a day or a moment that I do not think of him and remember his advice and ideas. In addition to his effect on me, my father has inspired many of his juniors, leaving his mark on their careers. But his real talent was his personal approach—the way he talked to each member of Al Watany Eye Hospital family as an individual and addressed their issues privately, wisely, and, most important, tirelessly. ■



Figure 2. The Al Watany Eye Hospital.

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