

Editorial

Remembering the first doctors worldwide who offered their lives fighting Ebola virus epidemic

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The outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa proved to be the longest and deadliest of them all [1]. As of the 15th of August 2014, more than 1250 deaths have occurred. This led to the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) in August 2014 that EBV is a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” [1]. All secondary cases of EBV were recorded among people who were in close contact with a patient or those who have been exposed to infected biological fluids. Nosocomial transmission has been documented to be behind many hospital outbreaks including the hospital staff [1-4]. In recognition of their humane role, the TIME (which has the world’s largest circulation for a weekly news magazine) featured in its cover the “Ebola Fighters” health professionals as the TIME Choice for Person of the Year 2014 [5]. This issue of the Sudanese Journal of Paediatrics (SJP) highlights and features the health professionals who offered their lives fighting the first EVD worldwide. The outbreak happened in Maridi in Southern Region of Sudan (currently South Sudan) between June and November 1976 [2,6]. From a total of 213 cases, 41 deaths occurred among the staff of Maridi Hospital [1,6-8]. These included the late Dr. Abdeen Khairy who (at the age of 28 years) was the only doctor working in Maridi Hospital during the outbreak [6,7]. He kept fighting the disease,

despite his illness, till he was transferred in serious condition to Juba and then to Khartoum, where he died of EBV. He was accompanied from Maridi to Juba by his colleague. Dr. Abdelrahman Ali (aged 27 years) who was working in Lewi near Maridi [7]. Dr. Abdelrahman Ali travelled to Khartoum and came back to Juba accompanied by the late Dr. Abdulgaffar Abdulaheem, Director of the Tropical Diseases Hospital, Omdurman (1976-1986) and Ex-President, Sudan Association of Physicians, who examined and looked after the transfer of Dr. Abdeen Kairy to Khartoum. In Khartoum, Dr. Abdeen was received and managed, till he passed away, by Dr. Ahmed Abdelhadi El Sayed (aged 26 years), who was the Medical House Officer (currently, Consultant Pediatrician), and the Medical Registrar Dr. Hisham Aman (aged 29 years) who is currently working as Consultant Physician [6].

Another account on Maridi EVD is reflected in the memoirs of Agricultural Engineer: Abdul-Wahab A. Babiker who has been transferred from the Nuba Maintains Agricultural Establishment (aged 24 years) to work in Maridi [9]. He describes the “nobility, generosity and chivalry” of the late Dr. Abdeen Khairy and affirms that he was determined to fight the epidemic and stay in Maridi despite his illness. Abdul-Wahab A. Babiker and his other colleagues

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(who belonged to different professions) have been contributing to the development of this rural area located more than a thousand kilometers from their home towns and villages in Sudan. The article [9] reflects a vivid example of solidarity, professionalism and bravery. Dr. Abdel Ghani Bakri (aged 27 years) replaced Dr. Abdeen Khairy in Maridi and fought the EVD till its end in November 1976 [7]. During his service a Sudanese Virologist, Dr. Babiker Mohamed El Tahir, from the National Health Laboratory, Khartoum Sudan, arrived with a team and collected specimens for virological studies. These, paved the way for the discovery of Ebola virus [10,11].

On 4 October 1976, a team of young doctors joined the Hospital Staff in Maridi and dealt with the patients till the end of the epidemic. These were Dr. Mahgoub Osman Karrar and Dr. Awad Osman Mahdi (both were Medical Registrars at Khartoum Hospital, Khartoum) and Dr. Hyder Hamza who had just finished his housemanship.

Dr. Mahgoub Osman Karrar (in association with

Dr. Awad Osman Mahdi) compiled the first clinical report, worldwide, describing EBV. This was titled "MARIDI VIRUS DISEASE", printed in Roneo (mimeograph) format and presented to the Ministry of Health, Sudan. The Report has cordially been sent to SJP by Dr. Ibrahim Hassan Fahal, and is reproduced in the current issue [8]. This report, being compiled by a young Registrar in Medicine, reflects the high standard of clinical skills [12] which Mahgoub Karrar acquired during his study at the College of Medicine, University of Khartoum (U of K), [13]. It testifies to a heritage which has been engraved by many pioneering physicians, represented by the late Prof. Dawoud Mustafa [14,15]. The amazing work of this group of young doctors vividly reflects commitment to serving people in the remotest areas, fighting against all hurdles [16-20], a tradition which is also engraved in the curriculum of the Faculty of Medicine, U of K. They also reflected a refined model of professionalism [21,22], team work [23], and commitment to the well-being of humanity [24].

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