

Living life's lesson



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THE doors of our medical practice in Cape Town were already closed when she arrived. In fact, we were exiting the premises when her father pulled up.

'She is not well,' he said. It was evident that she was quite ill. I saw her in this state before, more than a decade ago. Shivering from the rigours of an infection somewhere in her body, she softly greeted.

'I am sorry to come so late but I suddenly got ill. I don't know why I am shaking so much,' she said. This was about two months after we had all returned from Hajj, and she, together with her parents and her uncle, were of those who had answered the invitation extended by Prophet Ibrahim (AS) thousands of years ago. We accompanied her into my room, where her demeanour was remarkably subdued. 'Don't worry, I have a good idea as to what is wrong. I am pretty certain that we will sort you out soon, like we always do,' I said, trying to reassure her. I thought of the first time I saw her for exactly the same problem many, many years prior to this incident.

She was morbidly obese then, as she still was now. She then had the same issue and, after a thorough examination, it was clear that she had quite a bad infection in one of her legs. This had led to a raging fever and distinctly unwell feeling.

At the first incident, she had a discussion about the infection, why I wanted to admit her to hos-

we should work on it once she had been discharged. I had called the specialist who was to look after her and emphasised to him that lifestyle changes had to be discussed with her.

I saw her a few months after the first incident with very little change in her weight. When I gently steered the conversation towards the benefits of a balanced diet and exercises, she became very irritated and indicated that she was trying very hard but that all her efforts were fruitless.

I steered the debate towards managing her medical conditions and tried to incorporate a weight loss programme into its management. Years later, however, we were not much further on the road to success, which frustrated her immensely.

I saw her on and off for a number of years for mostly acute, self-limiting conditions, such as chest infections and, unfortunately, she never really presented often enough for us to actively manage her.

We spoke of religion now and then but she never really showed a great interest in the topic. She was aware that I accompanied pilgrims on Hajj annually but only referred to it when she indicated at a visit that she had been at our practice but 'Doc, as usual, ran away to Makkah.'

This changed about three years ago when she indicated an interest in performing Hajj. By then, she was in her early forties. 'I want to take my parents to Hajj,' she said, out of the blue, one day. They had put their names on the waiting list. 'I don't know how long I am going to live,' she added, as a matter of explanation.

'You are going to live long and you are definitely going to go on the greatest journey ever!' I reassured her. 'In fact, I can tell you now that we are going to meet on Arafah; mark my word,' I said.

'I want to go as soon as possible,' she said, and then spoke of her plans to perform Umrah almost immediately. 'Maybe I will not be able to go for Hajj so, at least, I will know that I was in Makkah and Madinah,' she explained.

I tried to reassure her that though her obesity and medical issues were certainly not to be treated lightly, she, Allah willing, certainly had a few decades still ahead of her on earth.

They were indeed blessed. Her parents also performed the minor pilgrimage and, a year later, they received the good news that they, as a family, would embark on the ultimate journey in the life of a Muslim.

Her mother had severe asthma, and she had limited mobility. Both of them required wheelchair assistance to some extent. Her father was also not in the best of health. They were, however, determined to make the best of the journey.

She was a very astute lady when it came to contractual issues with her operator and would approach them if their promises that were supposed to benefit her parents were not met. Her and her mother's relative immobility and wheelchair dependence meant that they could not always achieve what their hearts deeply desired, such as additional tawaafs.

But the ultimate aim was Arafah. And, with Allah's blessings, they were all present at the time of Wuquof to beseech their Creator to forgive them of all their trespassings and bless them to be as sinless as new-born babies.

Her mother took ill just before we had to leave Arafah and I duly attended to her. The daughter also indicated that she was not feeling well. It was stiflingly hot and humid, and water was running out in the camp.

'So we meet on Arafah; did I not tell you we would?' I tried

starting to engage her. She was physically drained and merely asked to be medically examined.

'Yes, Alhamdulillah, we are on Arafah,' she said as I was about to leave.

'Don't worry, Hajj is Arafah. Every ritual from now on can either be postponed, can be deputised for you or, as a last resort, be paid a penalty for,' I tried to encourage her. She smiled. I saw her again on Mina two days later and she was feeling much better. Her Hajj was complete.

Now, in the present, back in Cape Town, she again presented with a severe leg infection. 'You are going to the emergency unit to be admitted,' I said.

She did not object nor question anything. 'I am not well, I don't think I am going to make it,' she softly said.

'Don't worry, it is exactly the same problem you had a long time ago. We know what it is and how to treat it,' I replied. She merely smiled. I called her two days later in hospital. The attending nurse told me that she was recovering.

When I spoke to her, however, she sounded very negative. 'The same excellent specialist who treated you all those years ago is looking after you, so please do not worry,' I pleaded with her.

'We cannot enforce our wishes on patients but, with your permission and co-operation, I am going to dictate your life for you once you are discharged from hospital. This will be until you are medically and physically well or until you are tired of me,' I said.

'Just say you want me to lose weight, Doc,' she replied.

'Insha Allah, we'll talk when I see you, which is going to be soon,' I concluded.

It was indeed soon but not how I had anticipated. She had deteriorated suddenly, and when I saw her, it was at her janazah a few days later.



For the pilgrim, burial in Jannatul Baqi is considered an honour but for those who return home and pass away, we pray that Allah SWT will raise them in the company of our beloved Prophet (SAW). Photo DR SALIM PARKER