

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Remembering Dr. Valiollah Assefi, the Father of Leprology in Iran

#### Abstract

Dr. Valiollah Assefi, an infectious disease specialist borne in 1927, has been one of the prominent researchers in Pasteur Institute in Iran. He played an important role in improving the health of the country during 40 years of his glorious activities. Dr Assefi did huge activities especially in the field of control of leprosy disease in Iran, and was the director of the leprosy control organization in Iran and the World Health Organization consultant for many years. He published numerous articles about the epidemiology and treatment of various infectious diseases in Iran.

**Keywords:** Pasteur Institute of Iran, infectious disease, leprosy

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#### Introduction

Dr. Valiollah Assefi was born in Ardabil in 1927 (Figure 1). After obtaining his diploma, He graduated in Medicine at the Mashhad medical school in 1953 and obtaining the title of infectious and tropical diseases specialist from University of Tehran in 1969. He also received a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree in epidemiology from school of public health

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in University of Tehran in 1974 (Figure 2) and leprology diploma in 1982 from University of Paris (Figure 3).

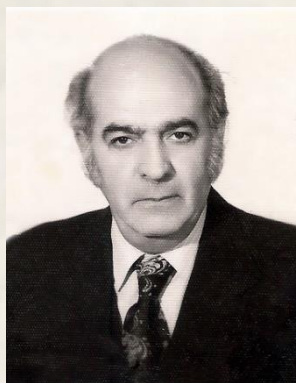


Figure 1. Dr. Valiollah Assefi 1927-2000 (Archives of Pasteur Institute of Iran)

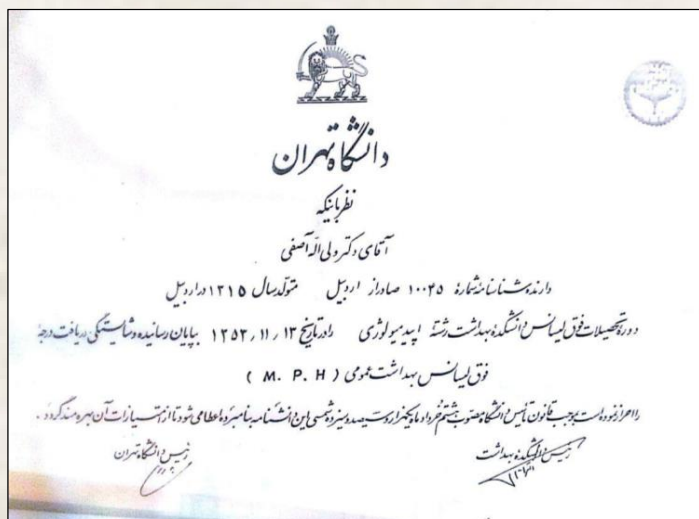


Figure 2. Master of Public Health (MPH) degree in epidemiology from school of public health in University of Tehran, 1974 (Archives of Pasteur Institute of Iran)

Dr Assefi, worked in Quchan, Qaen and Gonabad health system from 1953 to 1957 after graduating from general medicine. His work led to control of typhoid, diphtheria, measles and smallpox outbreaks in these areas.

In 1957, he was appointed as the physician of the Pasteur Institute of Iran. He stayed at this Institute until his retirement in 1985. His positions at the Pasteur Institute of Iran were the head of the laboratory, the assistant and head of the department of epidemiology and clinical researchers and the general director of the Institute, respectively.

Dr Assefi, for a while, was also the research agent of Institute Pasteur of Iran in Imam Khomeini Hospital and Firoz

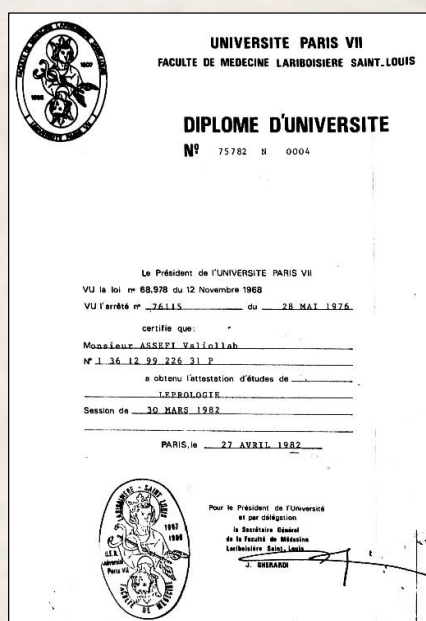


Figure 3. Leprology diploma from University of Paris, 1982  
(Archives of Pasteur Institute of Iran)

abadi Hospital in Tehran. He was also the Head of the hospital of Lion and Khorshid (current Fatemi Hospital) of Ardebil in 1971.

Dr Assefi was also a member of the Health Community of Iran, a member of the Cancer Society, a member of the International Leprosy Association, a member of the Red Crescent Society, a member of the French-language leprology community, a member of French Infectious Diseases Society, a member of the Argentine Leprosy Institute and a member of the Balkan medical community. Dr Assefi was an honorary teacher at the Medical School of University of Tehran, an official expert and advisor to the World Health Organization on leprosy. He was also the director of the scientific journal of the Pasteur Institute of Iran and a member of the editorial board of the “Sokhan-e-Pezeshki” magazine.

For many years, he has traveled to the different parts of Iran, along with field and research teams of the Pasteur Institute in Iran. In addition to leprosy, he also led the research on the monitoring of other infectious diseases such as plague, typhoid, rabies, tularemia and arboviruses, which were the tasks of the Pasteur Institute of Iran. He became eligible for retirement due to illness in 1985 and retired.

The main scientific activities of Dr. Assefi were in the field of infectious and tropical diseases, and this article briefly reviews these activities.



### Studies in the field of Leprosy

Dr. Assefi has spent a lot of his career years working on leprosy disease in different parts of Iran. He became acquainted with leprosy patients since his medical education in Mashhad and his 5-year service period in various cities of Khorasan. Since 1973, the continuation of leprosy outbreaks in Khorasan province has led him to travel to cities like Quchan, Bojnord, Shirvan and Esfarrayen several times in order to study and visit the affected areas and explore the possibility of cooperation of the Pasteur Institute of Iran in the control over this disease. He conducted detailed scientific and epidemiological studies on this field. In 1975 and 1978, he presented his research findings on patients with leprosy in Khorasan province.<sup>1,2</sup>

Due to his knowledge and experience, Dr. Assefi has been director and deputy minister of health in the national anti-leprosy community since 1978 (Figure 4), and he has done important works in developing health and rehabilitation centers for patients with leprosy throughout the country (Figure 5).

1-Assefi, 1975: 1682-455.

2- VA, 1979: 1.

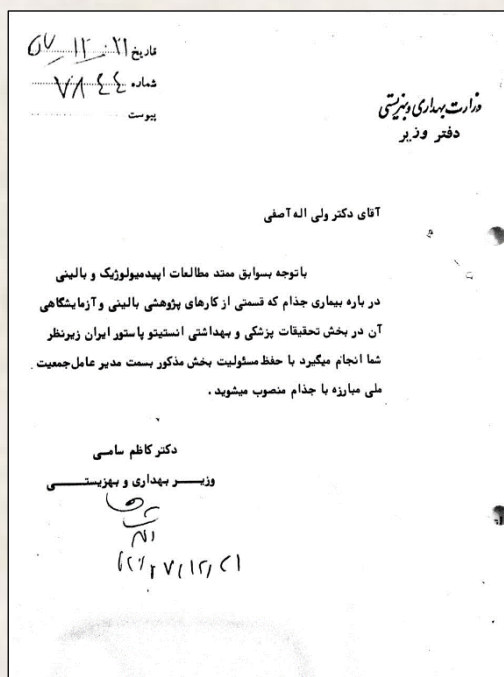


Figure 4: Appointment of Dr. Assefi as director of the national population against leprosy, June 1978 (Archives of Pasteur Institute of Iran)







- 3- Asefi, 1977: 1.
- 4- Asefi, 1981: 1.
- 5- VA, 1982: 351.
- 6- VA, 1984.

*Figure 5: Mission of the Minister of Health to Dr. Assefi to survey the status of leprosy in Khorasan, December 1979 (Archives of Pasteur Institute of Iran)*

His studies of leprosy patients were not limited to Khorasan province. He carried out extensive studies on leprosy patients who were living in the Baba Baghi sanitarium (one of the villages of East Azerbaijan province located in the central part of Tabriz county). It also played an important role in controlling the disease in this area. For a while, he also studied leprosy patients in the Bashagard County of Hormozgan province.

Dr. Assefi studied the immunology of leprosy disease in 1977.<sup>3</sup> In an article written by Dr. Assefi in 1981, general views on leprosy were discussed. He believed that the people's behaviors and actions, the lack of awareness within the community about the disease and rumors was the main causes of fear about the disease in the society, which caused the patient not to visit the physician, and it results to fail to treat, prevent and eradicate the disease.<sup>4</sup>

In the article "Neuritis in Leprosy" (1982), he described the specific forms of neurotic leprosy such as neurites, polyneuritis, peripheral paralysis and other lesions, and their treatment methods.<sup>5</sup>

In an article published in 1984, his experiences and information about the status of leprosy disease were shared.<sup>6</sup>

He was also a well-known person in the field of leprosy in the international communities. He attended to numerous international meetings in this regard at the invitation of the



World Health Organization and as a consultant to this international organization. Due to extensive research on infectious diseases, particularly leprosy, he has been named the father of leprosy in Iran.

### Other studies

Dr. Assefi is one of the pioneers in the study of Iranian arboviruses. In 1973, he studied the patients with infectious hemorrhagic syndrome in East Azerbaijan province and considered it as a kind of arbovirus.<sup>7</sup> He published a book on arboviruses in 1978.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Assefi has extensive research on Chinese's medicine and has published his research results in the form of an article.<sup>9</sup>

and two books named, The basics and principles of acupuncture (1974)<sup>10</sup> and acupuncture without needles (Shiatsu) (1991 ).<sup>11</sup>

He also has conducted studies and published articles about meningococcal septicemia (1974),<sup>12</sup> nocardiosis (1977),<sup>13</sup> diphtheria (1970),<sup>14</sup> listeria (1988),<sup>15</sup> herpes (1967),<sup>16</sup> leptospirosis (1968),<sup>17</sup> purulent meningitis (1968),<sup>18,19</sup> complications of purulent meningitis (1969),<sup>20</sup> salicylic meningitis (1969),<sup>21</sup> listeriosis (1969),<sup>22</sup> fungal diseases (1970),<sup>23</sup> respiratory radiation (1971),<sup>24</sup> splenomegaly (1972),<sup>25</sup> food poisoning (1972),<sup>26,27</sup> coronary infarction (1972),<sup>28</sup> respiratory failure and chronic heart disease (1970),<sup>29</sup> photopathy and infectious and parasitic infections transmitted from mother to fetus (1983).<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Assefi published his results in 1985 on the principles of scientific research and the factors that inhibit research.<sup>31</sup>

### Books

He published numerous books such as "bacterial and tuberculous meningitis" (1968),<sup>32</sup> "Honey Medical Properties" (1969)<sup>33</sup>, "The Basics and Principles of Chinese Acupuncture" (1974),<sup>34</sup> "Arboviruses" (1977),<sup>35</sup> "Leprosy" (1980),<sup>36</sup> "drug resistance and leprosy disease" (1982),<sup>37</sup> "Sleep in the viewpoint of Pavlov" (1989),<sup>38</sup> "Analytical Review of Medical and Social Medicine on Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (1987 and 1989),<sup>39</sup> "Needleless Acupuncture (Shiatsu)" (1991),<sup>40</sup> "Outbreak of STDs in the Today's World and its Social Reflection" 1993),<sup>41</sup> "General Knowledge about the HIV/AIDS" (1993),<sup>42</sup> "Infectious and Parasitic Diseases transmitted from Mother to Infants" (1996),<sup>43</sup> and "the organization of the human body and its various mechanisms in the fight against harmful factors"<sup>44</sup>.

- 7- VA, 1975:182.
- 8- VA, 1977.
- 9- VA, 1973.
- 10- VA, 1973.
- 11- VA, 1991:255.
- 12- VA, 1974:1.
- 13- VA, 1977:394.
- 14- Asefi, 1970:7.
- 15- VA, 1988:11-15.
- 16- VA, 1967:1.
- 17- VA, 1968:8-9.
- 18- VA, 1968.
- 19- VA, 1968, 7:11-12.
- 20- VA, 1969, 8:11-12.
- 21- VA, 1969, 8:11-12.
- 22- VA, 1969, 8:11-12.
- 23- VA, 1971, 10:3-4.
- 24- VA, 1971, 11:11-12.
- 25- VA, 1972, 12:7-8.
- 26- VA, 1973, 13:2.
- 27- VA, 1973.
- 28- VA, 1972, 12:1.
- 29- VA, 1972, 12:1.
- 30- VA, 1983.
- 31- VA, 1985.
- 32- VA, 1968.
- 33- VA, 1969.
- 34- VA, 1973.
- 35- VA, 1977.
- 36- VA, 1982.
- 37- VA, 1982.
- 38- IPP R, 1976.
- 39- VA, 1987.
- 40- VA, 1991.
- 41- VA, 1993:206.
- 42- VA, 1993:200.
- 43- VA, 1997.
- 44- VA, 1997.



Dr. Assefi had two children, Mary and Masih. He died in 2000.

May his soul rest in peace, and may too many people follow his way.

### Discussion

Dr. Valiollah Assefi's, is one of the famous researchers of Pasteur Institute in Iran. He played an important role in improving the health of the country during 40 years of his glorious activities. He is one of the prominent scholars on leprosy, and have published numerous scientific articles on clinical epidemiology and comparative immunology of infectious disease. Apart from leprosy, he has been one of the well-known researchers on the study of arboviruses, nocardiosis, diphtheria, listeriosis, and leptospirosis. Dr. Assefi can be the symbol of a person who has devoted all his life to survive other patient people.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the elder scientists of the Pasteur Institute of Iran, such as Dr. Valiollah Assefi, who have done great work in the past to promote the name of the Pasteur Institute of Iran and provided valuable services to the country and the world.

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