Prof. Ismail Lotfy El-Shafei (1928–2009)

It is my great honor to write an obituary for Prof. Ismail Lotfy El-Shafei.

Ismail, my dear friend and senior colleague, was a true academic and research pioneer, as well as a skilled neurosurgeon and warm-hearted clinician who dedicated his life to neurosurgery and to his patients. In our many years of encounter, I always enjoyed our professional and personal connection, and felt that our friendship was based on an incredibly similar and shared set of values and ideals. I hope that this too short summary of Prof. El-Shafei's lifework will give our readers at least a sense of the exceptional man that we have lost.

Ismail Lotfy El-Shafei was born in Cairo in 1928. Despite losing his father at the young age of 14, his mother encouraged him to continue his education and work towards his professional and personal goals. He studied at the Faculty of Medicine of Cairo University, continuing on at the University for a Master's degree and Doctorate in General Surgery.

Prof. El-Shafei began his working career as a House Officer at the Kasr El-Eini University Hospital of Cairo University, moving steadily up through the ranks to become Resident Registrar, Clinical Demonstrator, Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Full Professor, and then Head of the Neurosurgical Department of the university hospital. Prof. El-Shafei ultimately became Head of the Special Surgery Department, including responsibility for all neurological, orthopedic, urological, and ear, nose, and throat surgery at the university hospital. He also served as Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Egyptian Journal of Neurosurgery.

Prof. El-Shafei's dedication to the hospital and patients was well known, as he devoted his life to the wel-

fare of his patients. He also left his beloved homeland, spending a few years traveling abroad, including London and Oxford in the UK and Boston in the US, to expand his professional horizons by studying the operating methodologies and techniques of other neurosurgery practices.

After his return from the UK, he was chosen by Prof. Dr. Osman Soror to be the first neurosurgery resident in Egypt! Even in his earliest years of practicing neurosurgery, Prof. El-Shafei was recognized as a skilled neurosurgeon through his studies with the early masters of neurosurgery, such as Profs. Popens and Torkildson. His warm

and caring personality contributed to his excellent reputation as a neurosurgeon. He enjoyed his work with children in particular. While Prof. El-Shafei worked with children from the beginning of his career, he began concentrating on pediatric neurosurgery in the 1970s, creating the Cairo University Children's Hospital and Pediatric Neurosurgery Department in 1984.

With all of Prof. El-Shafei's clinical success, he was primarily an anatomist, fascinated by pure research in the neurosciences. Back in the late 1950s, when neurosurgery was in its infancy and the whole Neurology Department consisted of only 5 beds, he was struck by the overdrainage caused by a ventriculo-ureteral shunt implanted in a small infant and by the fact that a patient had to undergo a nephrectomy to treat hydrocephalus. From that time, he was fascinated by the study of shunts and drainage, a problem which has remained intractable to this day despite significant advances in shunting technology and surgical techniques.

Prof. El-Shafei devoted much time and energy to researching new shunting options, developing a class of retrograde ventriculo-venous shunts in an effort to raise the standard of shunt functionality and thereby improve the quality of life for his patients. Despite many obstacles in the path to developing the new shunt model, he achieved a USPTO patency for the retrograde ventriculo-jugular shunt in 1986. He also received the Pudenz Award for excellence in CSF physiology in 1991. Strange as it may seem to our current readers, correspondence at that time was not via instantaneous email messages. Communication was via telex and (snail) mail, requiring a lot of effort and consuming time from his busy schedule.

Prof. El-Shafei researched many other aspects of neurosurgery as well. His warm personality led to strong personal connections with his professional colleagues. For example, his best friend was the Chairman of the Chemical Engineering Department at Cairo University. They closely worked together in experiments related to shunt development. They also collaborated during the seventies to develop a spinal-protective vest for air force pilots who fall from great heights.

Prof. El-Shafei was dedicated to the development of neurosurgery and devoted to teaching his fellows. For all his cleverness and skill, all his colleagues knew him for

his humble nature, for being supportive of his students and a warm friend on both the professional and personal levels.

Throughout his clinical and scientific career, he held several major positions and responsibilities in Egypt and also internationally. Prof. El-Shafei was a member of the International Society for Neurological Surgeons, the International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery, and the European Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery, also serving as a postgraduate instructor for the European Society. He was a founding member of international societies such as:

- Middle East Neurosurgeons;
- Pan African Society of Neurosurgeons;
- Egyptian Society for Neurology, Psychiatry, and Neurosurgery;
- Arab Society for Neurological, Psychiatric, and Neurosurgical Diseases, and
- Egyptian Society for Neurosurgeons, serving as Honorary President of this society since 1990.

With all of Prof. El-Shafei's professional success, his family was always at the center of his life. His father's premature death left his mother a widow raising 7 children alone. Each child was raised to achieve personal and professional success, with a lifelong closeness between family members. Prof. El-Shafei served as a warm godfather, teacher, and friend to his siblings, their children, and the extended family.

Prof. El-Shafei's breadth of knowledge enriched everyone's lives, as he was well read in science, religion, politics, and literature, both Arabic and English. His opinions were well respected, reflecting his far-seeing vision and wide perspective on life. His expanded worldview is reflected in the lives of his own 2 children. His son, Hassan I. El-Shafei, MD, is also a neurosurgeon, currently director of the Cairo Neuro-Spine Center, and 2 of his 4 grandchildren studied engineering and economics, the other 2 being still young.

The ultimate tribute to Prof. El-Shafei's life is expressed in the words of his son Hassan El-Shafei, who wrote: 'In our family, we believe that if we were to describe the ideal dream of a father, a friend, or a partner, it would be like my father.'

Shlomi Constantini, Tel-Aviv, Israel