



**In Memoriam Avedis Donabedian  
(1919 – 2000)**

*If we are truly committed to quality, almost any mechanism will work. If we are not, the most elegantly constructed of mechanisms will fail.*

Great sadness has filled our hearts when the news of the death of Avedis Donabedian, a Nathan Sinai Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Public Health, reached us. On Thursday, November 9, 2000, we lost a dear colleague and friend, a great physician and scientist, who left the world a better place than he found it.

Avedis was born in Beirut, Lebanon, but grew up in Ramallah, a town to the west of the river Jordan, in – at that time – the British Mandate of Palestine, where he was educated in Christian schools. In 1944, he completed his medical studies at the American University of Beirut, went back to Jerusalem, and acted as a superintendent of the English Mission Hospital until 1947. He returned to Beirut in 1947 and worked at the American University until 1955, when he moved to the United States. Having obtained his M.P.H. at the Harvard School of Public Health, he began teaching preventive medicine, organization of medical care, and public health at various universities in the States. He was a Professor of Medical Care Organization at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, from 1966 to 1979; a Nathan Sinai Distinguished Professor of Public Health at the same University, from 1979 to 1989; and Emeritus since 1989.

Avedis Donabedian has had a lifelong commitment to promoting the use of performance measures to assess and improve the quality of health care services. He is most widely recognized for his structure-process-outcome formulation for quality assessment activities. This model has set the framework for most contemporary

quality measurement and improvement activities in health care across the world.

His professional work has focused on the systematization of knowledge throughout health care organizations, especially with respect to quality assessment and monitoring. His contributions, including six books and many other publications, have been recognized by many awards and membership in many respected academies and institutes. He was a life member of the International Society for Quality in Health Care, which has recommended him for recognition as a physician who made a lasting mark on the 20th century.

Over many years, Professor Donabedian has been a much-valued mentor and inspiring guide to many organizations and individuals, keen to pursue ways to continually improve the quality of health care. He has referred to the most important single condition for success in assuring quality of care, as “the determination to make it work. If we are truly committed to quality, almost any mechanism will work. If we are not, the most elegantly constructed of mechanisms will fail.”

In addition to being a great scientist and an outstanding teacher, Avedis was a warm and open person, always kind and keen to make new friends. He was a trusted friend and companion and touched the lives of many people. He was loved and admired, and will be badly missed and remembered by all.

Dr Reuben Eldar  
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