

## Special Article

# Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi: A Mentor Par-excellence



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## ABSTRACT

In the context of academic medical education, mentorship has been known to play an undeniable role in academic and personal development of junior mentees, as well as guiding them through their carrier, research, and education. Here in, we enumerated the qualities and characteristics of a good mentor, through introducing an exemplary mentor in neurosurgery: Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi. He had been an exemplary mentor with professional mentorship characteristics including altruistic and understanding, accessible and punctual, knowledgeable and experienced, able to assist mentees in defining and reaching goals, senior and well-respected in the field, sincerely dedicated to developing an important relationship with the mentee. Professor Amirjamshidi had been a role model as a mentor steering his mentees in changing their professional life by directing them in the right direction. To achieve this coveted goal, Professor Amirjamshidi would invest time and energy to ascertain that his mentees achieve the loftiest goals in their professional career. He has been present both at the national and international forums as an invited speaker, and has served as a member of the editorial boards of reputed journals. Besides, he has innumerable publications to his credit in peer-reviewed journals.

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## Dear editor

**E**ntered the portals of a neurosurgical department as a new entrant, one is startled as how to survive and make a forward leap in such a maiden and new set up. In such an environment, which is totally alien, you need someone to put you on the right track with love, affection and compassion. Herein lies the role of a mentor to pave for you the difficult terrain, so that you as a junior can find it more hospitable and friendly. To overcome your apprehensions and help you in such an inhospitable and strange set up, there you find a person in the name of Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi impeccably dressed in his white overall and greeting you with smiles as your future mentor and custodian (Figure 1).

In the context of academic medical education, mentorship has been known to play an undeniable role in academic and personal development of junior mentees, as well as guiding them through their carrier, research, and education [1]. Here in, we aimed to enumerate the qualities and characteristics of a good mentor, through introducing an exemplary mentor in neurosurgery: Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi.

Born in 1952, in the old neighborhood of Rey in Tehran city, Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi is a paradigm of good mentor believing in training successful collegians as a true joy for a teacher! After completing his primary education, he began his academic education in clinical medicine in [Tehran University of Medical Sciences \(TUMS\)](#), continued by specialty training in neurosurgery in the same center, followed by subspecialties in skull-base microsurgery and microvascular surgery at Hannover University, Germany and Queen Mary University, England respectively [2].

As discussed in a number of studies, mentors need to have personal, rational, and professional characteristics, of which we may describe some relevant ones to mentorship in neurosurgery [1]:

### Altruistic and understanding

As a personal characteristic of a mentor in the course of mentorship, one should be altruistic towards the mentees and be understanding of their situation, which leads to being accepted, respected and followed by the mentees [3]. In addition to being a mentor, a physician also needs to have such qualities towards the patients. On that account, Professor Amirjamshidi is respectful of his students, treating them in an altruistic manner away



**Figure 1.** Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi as a par-excellence mentor in neurosurgery. The weekly academic gathering of neurosurgery department at Shariati Hospital.

from arrogance as he says: “I always learn from my junior colleagues” [2]. Of note, he is also a responsible physician towards his patients, with regular follow-ups on their course of treatment as well as daily visits of his patients in private practice.

### Accessible and punctual

As enumerated by a number of studies, a good mentor needs to be available, easily accessible, and devote a rational amount of time to the matters of education and mentorship [3-5]. As a notable person encompassing such qualities, Professor Amirjamshidi is well known to be an early riser since the past 4 decades of his academic life to attend the morning rounds at 7:00 AM in Sina Hospital together with his junior colleagues and students. Meanwhile, he is known to attend the weekly grand rounds discussing a clinical case with residents, where he patiently discusses different aspects of a clinical case, motivating critical thinking in the matter (Figure 1). While this punctuality could be role-modeled, his availability makes him a good senior candidate to be referred by a junior for a consult in the matters of education, practice, etc.

### Knowledgeable and experienced

Taking the speed of knowledge turnover in the current high-tech world to account, one should stay updated along with improving the experience and skills in order to fulfill the necessities of being a qualified mentor and teacher [4, 5]. Accordingly, it is notable to mention that Professor Amirjamshidi devoted a considerable amount

of his time to stay updated in almost every aspect of neurosurgery, despite his higher focus on brain-related subjects. This has been doable through reviewing the newly published references and journals in neurosurgery in a daily course over the past 35 years of his carrier in this field, which has made him a live historian in neurosurgery as he masters the historical course of scientific developments in neurosurgery during the past four decades. He also declares, “one may never become a good tutor, unless staying updated” [2].

### Able to assist mentees in defining and reaching goals

Another characteristic of a mentor is to have teaching spirit, and being motivated to guide the mentees through the right path to achieve their educational goals [6]. Professor Amirjamshidi is distinguished to have a multidirectional approach to problems, especially the matters concerning patients and residents. As an example, while having a multidirectional view to the patient’s imaging before operation, he motivates his students to follow the same manner when approaching a patient, as well as approaching different matters in life. Importantly, avoiding tunnel vision and promoting the juniors to do so would be a great effort of a good mentor in guiding the mentees to achieve their goals, as followed by Professor Amirjamshidi. It should be noted that Professor Amirjamshidi promotes critical thinking in education of neurosurgery, through approaching and discussing each patient in a critical rather than challenging view, in the meantime of demanding evidence for accepting the matters!



**Figure 2.** Professor Amirjamshidi as a charismatic senior neurosurgeon, sharing his experiences at the celebration of a thousand endoscopic skull base surgeries at Imam Khomeini Hospital Complex (IKHC)

### Senior and well-respected in their field

A professional characteristic of a good mentor, is to be charismatic and well-respected in the field, so the juniors would be motivated to follow their advice [3, 5]. The charismatic characters are often the senior members of a society with a fardel of experience and expertise in a field, blended with a sublime personality, which make them good role models and mentors for the youngsters in the field. It is worth mentioning that Professor Amirjamshidi has grown a charismatic characteristic over the 35 years of experience in neurosurgery, which has made him a role model to be followed not only by his own students but also by other juniors in neurosurgery (Figure 2).

### Sincerely dedicated to developing an important relationship with the mentee

In order to become a good mentor and achieve the conformity of the mentees, a mentor needs to develop a rational and disciplined relationship with the mentees [1, 5]. It should be noted of course, that the mentees would learn from the mentor's overall outlook in addition to his teachings. In this aspect, while having the spirit of showing respect towards his former professors, some of whom have passed away, Professor Amirjamshidi has and promotes the spirit of discipleship although he is a senior professor with over three decades of teaching. Having this concept, he is always eager to

learn more, even from juniors. This would be possible only though making a friendly yet disciplined bond between the mentor and mentees. He also believes that "training a resident is similar to raising a child as a parent; therefore, the teachers' efforts would be efficient only when meritorious children are raised. The joy of a teacher's life is to train successful students".

Professor Amirjamshidi had been a role model as a mentor steering his mentees in changing their professional life by directing them in the right direction. To achieve this coveted goal, Professor Amirjamshidi would invest time and energy to ascertain that his mentees achieve the loftiest goals in their professional career. He had been as asset and had been always ready to provide a critical appraisal of all the complexities of neurosurgery. His mentees rightly stood on his shoulders to see the distant horizon. His wisdom, knowledge, and vast experience always served as a beacon of light for his mentees and colleagues. Professor Amirjamshidi changed the trajectory of his mentees for the better through his commitment and colossal interest. His patience, insight and constant reassurance has always helped his mentees navigate through times and difficult terrains.

All we can do is to say a big thank you to you Professor Amirjamshidi. You had been the torchbearer of knowledge and an exemplary mentor.



**Figure 3.** Professor Amirjamshidi as a senior speaker in a national gathering

To conclude, it would be injustice if we don't make a passing reference to his scholastic literary scores during his 35 years of service as an academician. He has been present both at the national and international forums as an invited speaker, and has served as a member of the editorial boards of reputed journals (Figure 3). Besides, he has innumerable publications to his credit in peer-reviewed journals. We wish you a long and healthy life.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this research.

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### Authors' contributions

Conceptualization and study design: Mehdi Zeinalizadeh; Data collection and drafting the manuscript: Sara Hanaei; Critically revising: Zahid Hussain Khan and Mehdi Zeinalizadeh; Final approval: All authors.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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## Comments

Dr. Abbas Amirjamshidi and I have worked side by side for decades. I met him when he was a young, talented and eager-to-learn student of mine at the Tehran University of Medical Sciences. It has been an honor and a privilege to have met and taught him, and to have helped shape him into the outstanding and exceptionally hardworking surgeon that he is today. Above all, I am most proud of the devoted educator that he has been, throughout the years, of the younger generation of neurosurgeons, particularly at the Sina and Shariati hospitals.

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### My Socrates in Neurosurgery

“Question everything. Learn something. Answer nothing.”

—Euripides

### Dear Editor in Chief,

I read with great interest the article by Hanaei et al. entitled “Professor Abbas Amirjamshidi: A Mentor Par-Excellence.” I commend the authors on this piece and would like to add my perspective as a former neurosurgical resident about my learning experience with Professor Amirjamshidi.

Some 18 years ago, I was a young fresh neurosurgical resident. Dreading by the formidable task of being a ‘good resident’, I was far from being confident about becoming a decent neurosurgeon, let alone surviving the daunting years of sleepless nights and unsurmountable number of to-do lists. Yet, my biggest concern was ‘Where do I even start to learn this?!’ Drowned deep in an ocean of innumerable consults, bedside procedures, H&Ps to complete, notes to write and dressings to change, this abysmal oblivion was an ‘ulcer to my soul.’ Not surprisingly, I did not even know how to learn. Finding myself clueless and vulnerable, I haphazardly started reading the classic bible of neurosurgery — The Youmans. The more I delved to understand the logical basis of neurosurgical diagnosis and treatment, the less I discovered.

The academic gatherings of our department took place on Thursdays. Case presentations, medical student thesis dissertations, and discussions of complications comprised the essence of these educational events. As a resident, I was privileged to witness these discussions and learn from them. I must admit however, that one particular attending was the star of every academic day: Abbas Amirjamshidi of the emblematic Sina Hospital, or as I refer to him here,



A.J. Religiously on-time, A.J. drove to Shariati hospital in his old Mercedes, and always appeared dressed-up. Usually, one or two cases were presented from each campus/hospital. The resident would hang the films onto the illuminator, then situate him/herself behind the podium and started the story: ‘this is a case of... with history of... who presented with...’ As the story unfolded, one would see A.J. walking towards the podium, apparently not so interested in what the resident was talking about, approaching the illuminator, and scrutinizing the films for a few seconds. Then, he would turn around, (sometimes) softly ask the resident a question about the story (which would reveal he actually was paying full attention to the speech) and sit down.

The next few minutes were usually about other attendings asking questions and reviewing films. At this point, A.J. would start asking a train of questions, putting the resident in a hot seat. He questioned almost everything the resident has presented about the case. Some of the questions would appear very basic to me, such that my novice mind would sometimes find them as pointless or irrelevant, as if he was questioning the obvious. These were intriguingly simple yet fundamental questions such as ‘Why is this a T1 sequence?’, ‘Why do you think this sign is important in this particular patient?’, and ‘Why do you think you are comparing apples to apples here?!’ Sometimes, the questions seemed funny: ‘How does the patient like his kabob?!’ Far from cliché questions like ‘What is the differential diagnosis of this lesion?’, his questions kept becoming more and more basic, and as they did, my mind would go progressively perplexed. Discombobulated and paralyzed by the plainness yet elemental nature of his questions, the entirety of my neuro knowledge was in question! Nothing was absolute, nothing was to be presumed, and nothing was completely right or completely wrong. Even not being the resident presenting the case, I felt I was actually in the hot seat myself. I felt like I was the subject of a neurosurgical psychoanalysis.

After going back and forth with the questions, the presenting resident, usually struggling with answers would finally give up in despair while maintaining his/her demeanor with a nervous smile. Then, like a flawless architect, A.J. would start putting everything together to ‘answer’ those questions, or was he?! In doing so, I was always, and I mean always, left in awe watching him cite papers from different authors about pros and cons of different perspectives he was discussing about the case. Sometimes, he seemed like he was contradicting himself when citing studies with almost opposite conclusions! No matter what the case was, cranial or spinal, vascular or tumor, infectious or inflammatory diseases, his immaculate memory would fetch a handful of relevant studies with the senior author’s name. His Socratic method would brew these questions and answers to perfection in order to plant the seed of scientific critical thinking in the resident’s mind. His attention to detail was unparalleled. He would break the case into a myriad of pieces and transform every piece into a nidus for research, learning and teaching. I could picture him envisioning every case as a large library with many books to learn from. Speaking of which, what also mesmerized me was his passion to keep au courant with contemporary as well as historical neurosurgical literature. ‘What a bibliophile! How does he manage to read everything about everything while being such a busy neurosurgeon?’, I asked myself. I never managed to ask him, but I believe there is only one answer to that question: an endless passion for patients and an insatiable desire to learn.

A.J. was a luminary for everyone in our department: students, residents, junior and senior attendings, even chairmen. Alas, my interaction with him was not extensive (we worked in different campuses). However, I believe he was more than successful in instituting the very core value of being a good doctor, surgeon, and scholar in his disciples’ minds, i.e., to question everything, even the questions, and to be a voracious reader. That is why I consider him my Socrates in Neurosurgery. Thanks to A.J., I keep that principle in mind all day, every day and try to let it guide me through my career.

Thank you.



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