

The Art of Aesthetic Medicine

A Libyan doctor's inspiring journey in the field of dermatology

By: R.N. Sugitha Nadarajah



Dr. Ebtisam Elghblawi

Ever since she was a young girl, it has always been Dr. Ebtisam Elghblawi's wish to become a medical doctor. Now, the Researcher in Spotlight for this issue is enjoying a thriving career as a private dermatologist at Saint James Hospital, Tripoli, Libya.

The dermatology expert is also a proud member of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which is one of the largest national medical associations with highly skilled professionals from all over the world.

"Medicine was my humble dream since I was young," says Dr. Elghblawi, who felt that she was lucky to have attended the medical school in her hometown in Tripoli. She adds, "I attained a high score which helped me enter into medicine and, moreover, I was top-ranked in my medical study years. I never failed any year, thanks to God, and my goal was to reach the highest degree in my career."

According to her, the circumstances in her own country made the chances of obtaining a Libyan scholarship seem almost like an impossible feat. "However, that didn't refrain me from reaching my aspiration of doing post-graduate study in dermatology," she asserts.

Dr. Elghblawi's aim to further her studies took her to the United Kingdom. "I did a Master's degree in the UK, which helped broaden my insights on research work," she says. Her scholarship was granted by the Chevening award, a prestigious UK government's international awards scheme given to outstanding scholars from all over the world. "I was selected out of 700 applicants based on the merits value," says the dermatologist proudly.

Determined to acquire more knowledge, Dr. Elghblawi also went the extra mile in order to study clinical dermatology via distance learning at Australian Institute of Clinical Dermatology. "I developed more passion for dermatology due to my mentor Dr. Ian McColl who was very caring and helpful," she says.

"Dr. Ian is a consultant dermatologist in Australia. His ways were really fascinating and it made me love the

subject by heart. It was a life-changing experience which brought out my true potential. It also made me a passionate individual and a far better dermatologist," says Dr. Elghblawi.

In addition to her qualifications in dermatology, Dr. Elghblawi received a Professional Diploma in Reproductive Health in Developing Countries at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK, and was also awarded with distinction.

While there, she wrote a thesis about genital warts and its lack of knowledge among women. "Only Australian women seem to have more knowledge about the issue compared to their counterparts all over the world," she says of her discovery, which was completely unexpected by her and her tutor. Her theses done during her postgraduate diploma "HPV Infection in Women" and Master's "Women and Critical Analysis of Pain" have since been published into books, as a result of her hard work. "I enjoyed this course a lot and it opened my mind to a lot of topics. As a matter of fact, it was here that I realised how much workplace diversity can ensure that there is a large pool of knowledge, skills, life experience, perspectives, and expertise to be shared and exchanged," says Dr. Elghblawi.

"The main reasons I enjoy clinical dermatology are the variety of medical presentations, the feeling of being



Dr. Elghblawi's poem as featured in Middle East Journal of Business

valued by the patients, and the occasional excitement of diagnosing something rare or exotic. Though the career is not paying too much money, doing the job properly is not boring at all to me,” she explains.

Not many are aware that this skilled dermatologist is also a talented poet and a passionate artist. In fact, Dr. Elghblawi’s artwork and poems have been featured in a number of journals, including the *Middle East Journal of Business*.

“The artworks that I do as a hobby are diverse, like drawing and writing poems. However some journals, based on their acquaintance with me, happened to know about my hobbies and requested me to send some artworks. I even wrote some poems and the last one published was about slavery,” she says.

Dr. Elghblawi, who has almost 20 years of clinical experience shares with us, “The years of clinical experience at dermatology clinics are my only achievements and I am proud of it, really. Last year, I was among the researchers who were given recognition with the awarding of a trophy for the best clinical laser case that I had submitted to a conference in Paris.”



Dr. Elghblawi: “Medicine is always evolving and what was applicable in the past is not so anymore. There is no limit to search further and get the new piece of knowledge to keep yourself scaled up.”

On the same note, she points out the challenges she faces in this field. “The biggest challenge in dermatology is that it is a visual medicine diagnosis, and is not parallel to other branches of medicine whereby you treat symptoms. Sometimes you are not confident about it as you don’t observe anything in reality and the main assumption can only be made by speculation, palpation, and by working out certain investigation and proposition,” says the skin specialist.

In addition to this, the fact that there is no medical insurance for Libyan doctors simply adds to her frustration and, according to Dr. Elghblawi, “it feels as if medicine doesn’t pay us back like other fields do, such as engineering which is fully insured by private companies.” She also claims that sometimes patients lose their trust on doctors due to various factors, one of it being the lack of proper healthcare infrastructure system and basic facility.

As a clinician with an ardent desire to improve her skills, Dr. Elghblawi isn’t discouraged and is never hesitant to put in extra efforts to achieve her goals. “I have lots of dream to hunt, but some are impossible due to many reasons including the high fiscal issues. However, nowadays as some courses are available online, I try my best to keep catching up and recently I also developed a passion for skin cancer study and the art of dermatoscopy,” she says.



Dr. Elghblawi’s artwork as featured in *Middle East Journal of Business*

One of the admirable qualities of the physician is that she strives to keep herself updated with the latest developments in her field of expertise. According to her, there is currently rapid advancement of targeted therapy, as well as the nanotechnology of creating the skin which can be used in serious cases where the skin had been destroyed. There is also focus on genetically-based drugs which could change ways in approaching and treating the patients.

“After all, medicine is always evolving and what was applicable in the past is not so any more. There is no limit to search further and get the new piece of knowledge to keep yourself scaled up,” concludes Dr. Elghblawi. ■

“Workplace diversity can ensure that there is a large pool of knowledge, skills, life experience, perspectives, and expertise to be shared and exchanged.”

Dr. Ebtisam Elghblawi publishes her work entitled “Frontier in hair loss and trichoscopy: A review” in this issue of JSD (page 80–96).
