



Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad  
MBBS, FRCP, FCPS

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A multifaceted personality who played his innings well and managed to get whatever he decided and thought of

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad FRCP, FCPS a noted Physician, former Principal of Allama Iqbal Medical College and King Edward Medical College Lahore passed away on June 1st 2014 at the age of 84. He leaves behind two sons, (Dr. Asif Iftikhar and Dr. Arif Iftikhar) two daughters who are also doctors, his wife and a large number friends and well wishers to mourn his death. May God Almighty rest the departed soul in eternal peace. **Ameen.**

Late Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad who was the best graduate of King Edward Medical College was a multifaceted personality who played his innings well and managed to get whatever he decided and thought of. On return from overseas after completing his postgraduate education, he joined Dow Medical College as Assistant Professor of Medicine. After the break up of One Unit, he was transferred to Punjab where he first served at Nishtar Medical College Multan and later served at Allama Iqbal Medical College as Principal. He surprised everyone including some faculty members of King Edward Medical College when he occupied the coveted post of Principal of KEMC, a dream of every KEMCOLIAN at a time when some people in the medical profession had written him off as he was not having cordial relations with the administration. He also served as Secretary Health, Government of Punjab for quite some time.

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was a determined fighter, for his rights as well as for his colleagues. He was deadly against people who were keen to join the faculty of various medical institutions through back door and lateral entry. He was of the view that

everyone should come to the teaching cadre through proper channels after competing in the Public Service Commission examination. This naturally earned him some enemies within the medical profession. However, Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad never minced words and continued to oppose all such moves. He was also against the faculty members getting any extension in service saying that it blocks the promotion chances of young faculty members who are waiting for their turn. Once they are denied their rights, it results in heart burning and also pollutes the academic environment. Once I was sitting with him in Principal's office at King Edward Medical College, a senior professor who was to retire next month came to see him with an application and requested him to forward it to the health department for his extension in service. Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad tore that application, put it in the dustbin and asked him to go home, relax and enjoy the retired life once he retires. I am not going to stay for a single day more when my date of retirement comes, he remarked. The professor concerned left his office frustrated.

He had his own style of teaching the students and would often tell stories and anecdotes to convey the message which the students will never forget. He always felt that the Pakistan Medical Association was not looking after the interests of young doctors, hence he supported the Pakistan Doctors Organization and in 70s and 80s was known as the Commander of the Young Doctors Army. Then a time came that he along with his friends decided to take over leadership of the PMA by contesting the elections but their efforts were thwarted by the PMA leadership. During the biennial meeting being held at Lahore, the PMA leadership fearing that Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad who enjoyed tremendous support and backing of a vast majority of the medical profession in general and the young doctors in particular and was contesting the elections for the post of President-elect, postponed the elections for a period of two years and announced to hold the elections at the next Biennial conference to be held at Karachi. They had thought that by that time his supporters will disperse and he won't be able to contest the elections. But they were not aware of his capabilities.

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was a great strategist and planner when it came to medical politics something which his adversaries were not aware of. After two years when the time of the next biennial conference came, he sent an advance team of young doctors to Karachi to plan the election strategy. PMA leadership was surprised to find out that his support base has increased further and he had managed to bring in a large number of his probable voters to Karachi from all over the country. As a last resort, they again postponed the elections for three days, to hold them on the last day of the conference instead of during the conference as scheduled and announced. Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad and his supporters again accepted the challenge and announced to contest the elections whenever they are held. Eventually the PMA leadership found itself in such a difficult situation that in order to save its face, they dumped his opponent whom they had asked to stand against Prof. Iftikhar, (another senior faculty member from King Edward Medical College) and declared that Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was now their own candidate. Hence, for the first time in the history of PMA, elections were held through secret ballot and Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was elected as President-elect. However, his close association with young doctors, some senior medical teachers allege, paved the way for spoiling the younger generation of doctors who no longer respect their seniors. He played a vital role in organizing the medical teachers conference at KEMC with Prof. Naseer Sheikh the then DG Health in PPP Government in 1973 and it was in this conference that the cadre of Associate Professor was recommended and created.

His love hate relationship with the administration and bureaucracy continued throughout his service. He was a human being and hence had his own weaknesses. Hence, some of the decisions which he took were not considered correct. For example he was against the entry test for admission to the medical colleges but little did he realize that the system of examination through Secondary Boards had become thoroughly corrupt and there was a need to have some system for evaluation of the students before admission to medical colleges. Eventually the entry test was started which worked well for some years before it also

became controversial. In fact Prof. Iftikhar was of the view that we need to strengthen the FSc Exam and make it transparent. If this exam can be manipulated, what is the guarantee that any other exam including the Entry Test the authorities wish to start will not be manipulated? His apprehensions later became true.

Once he was made an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) when he was Principal of AIMC. He used to go to the Secretariat in the morning and sit in the Health Secretary's office to their great embarrassment. I was attending the medical education conference at Ayub Medical College Abbottabad when Dr. Basharat Jazbi the then Federal Health Advisor and Maj.Gen. Mohammad Iqbal the then DG Health knowing that I had very friendly relationship with Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad, told me that "Your friend has been kicked out of Lahore and now he will never return". I told Dr. Basharat Jazbi that "He will come back with a Bang very soon and you will come to know about it" When Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad eventually got reinstated after few weeks, I rang up Dr. Basharat Jazbi who then told me that "Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad operates at a much higher level than he thought" and that is exactly I was trying to make you understand, I replied.

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was never at ease with the bureaucracy as he felt that they do not respect members of the medical profession which they deserve. He was also very critical of his professional colleague professors who would go to the Secretariat too often to please the Section Officers and other health officials. He had a go at the bureaucracy when he invited President General Ziaul Haque as the Chief Guest at the KEMC Convocation held on December 16th 1987. In the presence of the whole provincial and federal bureaucracy which mattered at that time, Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad first narrated a few couplets from Sufi Saints *Baba Bulley Shah* and *Hazrat Sultan Bahoo* and then said "it is a well-known fact that only the brilliant students take up the science subjects. Every year after the FSc result is out, the "Cream" of the students opts to join medical colleges and adopt medicine as their career while the left over which is "*Lassi*" and nothing else goes to civil service, business, law,

politics and other professions. After becoming doctors, this cream of the society spends many years of hard work doing post-graduation and specializing at home and overseas studying at the best medical institutions in the world. They are inducted as medical teachers in Grade-17 to begin with and the maximum which they can get is Grade-20. And look at the tragedy the Lassi Group which joins Civil Service has all the opportunities not only to go up to Grade-22 but what is most unfortunate is that they also rule over the “Cream” and sent the audience laughing who kept on clapping for quite some time.

The bureaucracy he further stated “never approves any scheme meant for the betterment or welfare of the healthcare professionals that is why doctors till today have been deprived of any service structure. The senior most teachers become Principal but he is powerless, helpless and some even say useless who cannot even sanction leave of his staff. He has no say in appointment of his staff, utilization of the college funds, purchase of equipment or any other development scheme. All these decisions rest with the health department which exercises them through Section Officers. Under such circumstances, how you expect the doctors to do their best”, Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad remarked. “This situation will never change till Lassi continues to rule over the Cream”, he added. In the end he made a passionate appeal to the President to see that justice is done to the healthcare professionals and they get a proper service structure.

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad had highlighted all these bitter facts in such a convincing manner that when President General Ziaul Haque came to address the gathering, instead of reading the written speech, he talked all along about the points raised by Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad in his address and referred to the words of *Cream* and *Lassi* too often. He announced that doctors in general and medical teachers in particular are members of a noble profession, they deserve all respect. He also announced that henceforth doctors including medical teachers will have their share in Grade-21 and 22 posts and instructions to this effect will be issued by the government. That is how Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad

earned Grade-21 and 22 for the senior doctors and medical teachers. Later Punjab Government issued a notification on February 18th 1988 empowering the Principal of KEMC. Another notification was later issued on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1989 whereby Principal KEMC was empowered to make appointments against vacant posts. The third notification issued on May 25th 1989 placed the maintenance funds at the disposal of Principal KEMC. Thus as a result of his struggle, he as Principal of KEMC enjoyed much more autonomy and powers than the Vice Chancellors of KEMU.

But as is well known, bureaucracy never forgives anyone who dares to challenge it, hence once again as a punishment he was made Chairman of the Punjab Chief Minister's Inspection Team. However, he told me that it was the best time during his service and he enjoyed each and every moment of it. We doctors and medical teachers in particular work so hard for long hours but we do not get those perks and privileges' which the bureaucracy enjoys. He started visiting various districts, monitoring the working of the bureaucracy and soon one could see these bureaucrats visiting his residence quite frequently. Yet another accomplishment of late Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad was that with the help of his colleagues, he conceived, planned and got the project of King Edward Medical College Doctors Housing Society commissioned and he served as its President till death.

Prof. Iftikhar Ahmad who was diagnosed to be suffering from triple vessel disease belonged to the conservative class of physicians. That is why despite the fact that he was advised cardiac surgery, he refused and said that he was quite content with the medications and would spend his remaining life on drugs rather than going for surgery. He has also authored a book based on his memoirs. He is also reported to have taken all important decisions regarding the family how things would work out in his absence thus saving the family members from any trouble. Red Rose on off white Jacket was his trademark and whenever he spoke at a meeting, he would most often recite few couplets from Sufi Saint *Baba Bulley Shah* and *Hazrat Sultan Bahoo* thus amusing the audience.

I last spoke to him on April 24th 2014 inviting him to the dinner of PAME Second National Conference being hosted at University of Health Sciences Lahore on April 26th 2014. He promised to attend but then on April 26th in the afternoon he rang me up saying that his muscles have become too weak. He was suffering from acute diarrhea since morning and regretted that he was not in a position to come to the dinner for which he felt sorry. However, he asked me to come and see him before I leave Lahore. I told him that I was a bit busy and it won't be possible but promised that during my next visit to Lahore, I will see him for the long overdue meeting but that day never came and he left this world.

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