REFRESHING AND INFORMATIVE GATHERING IN TORONTO

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It is refreshing to witness the convergence of organizations with varied interests and goals under the same roof. It's a rare phenomenon which helps people experience a sense of belonging to the larger community rather than to restrictive clans. Such a "luxury" was offered by the Armenian Canadian Medical Association of Ontario (ACMAO) in Nov. 24 at the Armenian Evangelical Church auditorium. It was a symposium suggested by Dr. Vicken Sepilian and organized by the decisive action of ACMAO President Dr. Ani Hasserjian. The symposium was followed by a gala in the evening to celebrate ACMAO's 30th anniversary.

Dr. Sepilian of California, an internationally-renowned fertility and reproductive medicine specialist who was elected president of the Armenian Medical International Committee (AMIC) at the 12th Armenian Medical World Congress in Buenos Aires (May-June 2017), was the guest speaker. Under Dr. Hasserjian's leadership a number of workshops, seminars and lectures related to health-care have been presented to the Toronto Armenian community over the past several years.

Some thirty representatives of Toronto organizations were present to showcase their humanitarian, charitable, health-care and construction activities in and for Armenia/Artsakh.

Unfortunately, the below report on the gathering is incomplete due to inclement weather conditions north of Toronto where I live. I missed most of the reports. However, I arrived in time to follow the presentations of Dr. Sepilian and Ontario neurologist Dr. Gaspar Israelian.

Dr. Gaspar Israelian

Being an alumnus of Yerevan State Medical Institute (University), it was a gratifying experience to hear about ground-breaking progress made in neurology in Armenia. Dr. Israelian presented a detailed timeline of activities spanning a decade, if not more, of physicians in Armenia organizing to launch a program of thrombolytic (dissolving clots) therapy that will save patients in sub-acute and acute phases of stroke. It was breathtaking to see the picture of a child held by his parents in the presence of the neurosurgeon. He is the first patient who underwent the procedure and whose life was saved. The audience in the auditorium was transfixed at the site of the image. Additional welcome news was the establishment of acute care units that will follow strict rules in line with American and Canadian guidelines.

It is worth mentioning that a number of physicians involved in the above activities received specialized training in US and Canada. Dr. Israelian and Dr. Berge Minassian, both neurologists, played an important role in arranging placements in Canada while the latter was also instrumental in training epileptologists (specialists in treating seizure), and organizing international seminars and workshops in Armenia.

Not being acquainted with the reproductive and fertility medicine, I feel inadequate to make any comments about the scientific merits of Dr. Sepilian's presentation which I enjoyed thoroughly. The slides were congruent with the substance and the doctor demonstrated an excellent flair for public speaking. However, being interested in immigration and population issues of Armenia, I found some of the data disturbing.

Dr. Sepilian provided fertility rates from late '90s to the present (2.5 and 1.6 respectively.) The 1960 data was 4.8, according to the World Bank. To evaluate the significance of these numbers allow me to cite Wikipedia "A population that maintained a TFR of 3.8 over an extended period without a corresponding high death or emigration rate would increase rapidly (doubling period ~ 32 years), whereas a population that maintained a TFR of 2.0 over a long time would decrease, unless it had a large enough immigration."

a. The 1960 data of the World Bank does not break down the cohort into ethnic components. Some Azeris were inhabitants of Armenia then. Could it be that this relatively high fertility rate of 4.8 was due their presence?
b. It appears that in addition to emigration from Armenia there is another factor that threatens society by causing depopulation. A drop from 2.5 to 1.6 is ominous. Will the authorities tackle this issue promptly with the introduction of meaningful incentives?

One of the factors that Dr. Sepilian mentioned which contributed to infertility in Armenia was the frequent use of abortions which cause anatomic changes in the uterus and reduce the chance of subsequent births. He advocated the use of contraceptives rather than abortion.

Additional disturbing news was the termination of pregnancy when a female fetus is conceived. It's apparent that prenatal ultrasound examination is being partially misused by parents in Armenia.

Dr. Vicken Sepilian

Following the presentations attendees expressed their opinions about the symposium. Overall it was considered to be a worthwhile and successful event. Hagop Janbazian, an independent attendee, proposed that the symposium be repeated for the community. The proposal was welcomed by almost all.

The ACMAO executive and Dr. Hasserjian should be commended for the informative symposium. If it is repeated as proposed above, the presence of other independent organizations would be beneficial; for example, the Yalkezian Foundation which "conducts humanitarian work in Armenia and surrounding areas, for the advancement of education, preservation of the environment, promotion of health, and relief of poverty."

The Armenian Holy Trinity Church "Parev" Centre, The Armenian Missionary Association of Canada (AMAC), The Armenian Relief Society (ARS) Toronto Roubina Chapter, Himnadram Toronto Chapter, The Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) of Canada and ACMAO.