



IN MEMORIAM

Nicholas S. Assali, M.D.
Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1916 — 2004

Nicholas Assali was born April 7, 1916, in Lebanon, in the Middle East, the sixth of nine children. His father was killed in an uprising against the French colonial government when Dr. Assali was nine years old, and the family subsequently spent the next seven years in an internment camp. Dr. Assali and his family then immigrated to Brazil to settle in Sao Paulo. Dr. Assali put himself through undergraduate and medical school, graduating from the University of Sao Paulo Medical School in 1943. His internship was in Medicine at the University Hospital, followed by a residency in surgery and gynecology. For two years Dr. Assali was an assistant in gynecology at the University of Sao Paulo, during which time he developed a clinic for the women working in the Red Light district of Sao Paulo, endeavoring to improve their sanitation, hygiene, and treatment of occupational diseases.

In 1946 Dr. Assali came to the United States and obtained a fellowship sponsored by the Institute of International Education. He accepted a position at Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, studying the treatment for toxemia during pregnancy. He moved to the University of Cincinnati in 1947 as a Fellow in Teaching and Research. In 1948 he was appointed assistant professor of obstetrics at the University of Cincinnati. In 1953 he joined the UCLA faculty as an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology and was subsequently promoted to professor in 1957, a position that he retained until his retirement in 1986.

Dr. Assali was one of the leaders in introducing hypothesis-based research to the field of obstetrics and gynecology. His studies on the regulation of blood pressure during pregnancy, the role of oxygen in maintaining the patency of the fetal ductus arteriosus, and the identification of the placenta as an endocrine organ are seminal findings, which opened these areas to many subsequent investigators. He was an innovator in the development of the electromagnetic flow meter, which is now used by investigators throughout the world. Dr. Assali's research was funded continuously for 38 years by the National Institutes of Health. In addition, he was the Director of the Public Health Training Program in Reproductive Physiology at UCLA for 12 years. Over 30 of his fellows went on to teaching and research positions. His publications of over 200 scientific papers, 20 book chapters and the editing of a two-volume and a three-volume treatise on the Biology of Gestation and on the Pathophysiology of Pregnancy, respectively, attest to his research productivity.

Dr. Assali was instrumental in the organization of the Society for Gynecologic Investigation, the premier research society in the specialty, and remained an active and vocal member for 45 years. He served as its third president and was awarded its first Outstanding Achievement Award in 1982. That same year he received the Arnaldo Vieira de Carvalho Award from the University of Sao Paulo, School of Medicine. Dr. Assali received the Virginia Apgar Award in Perinatal Pediatrics from the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1978. He was a member of the American Physiological Society, the American Federation for Clinical Research, the American Heart Association, and the American Gynecological and Obstetrical Society. He was an honorary member of many obstetrical and gynecological and research societies throughout the world. He was a member

of the National Institutes of Health General Medicine Study Section for four years. Dr. Assali also served as a member of the Academic Freedom Committee of the Academic Senate.

As an early member of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dr. Assali played a major role in bringing the department to national prominence and making it one of the premier departments in the country. He was a strong advocate and practitioner of maintaining a basic science relevancy in clinical teaching for both students and residents. His emphasis on critical analysis and a scientific approach to clinical practice greatly enhanced the quality of the UCLA residency in obstetrics and gynecology and stimulated many residents to pursue fellowship training and academic careers.

Dr. Assali was a true renaissance man, leading the specialty of obstetrics and gynecology from observational case reports to hypothesis-based scientific research. His breadth of research is truly amazing. Any one of his areas of research would have kept the average investigator busy for a lifetime but his insatiable curiosity always drove him on to the next question and the next project. All the while, he maintained his humility and sense of what was right and never hesitated to speak out against injustice.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Pauline, and his sons Robin and Billy.

Charles R. Brinkman, III