

Voices that ever reverberate—in memory of Dr. Prof. Lawrence Grouse

Guangqiao Zeng; on behalf of Journal of Thoracic Disease

Journal of Thoracic Disease, China State Key Laboratory of Respiratory Disease, Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease, First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou 510120, China

Correspondence to: Guangqiao Zeng. Journal of Thoracic Disease, China State Key Laboratory of Respiratory Disease, Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease, First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou 510120, China. Email: zgqiao@vip.163.com.

Submitted Jul 10, 2016. Accepted for publication Jul 15, 2016.

doi: 10.21037/jtd.2016.07.70

View this article at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/jtd.2016.07.70>

I really hope that I had not written up this memorial article—never—just as we do not worry about missing the sight of sunlight when we wake up every morning, or we stretch out our hands for help and somebody would hold them. We are not concerned too much, as though we should enjoy endless plenty of friendship, love, and salvation in life. I was wrong...

We first met in Rome, in a summer afternoon of 2009. I could recall my anxious hurry to locate the venue for a conference on respiratory diseases in the lobby of a large hotel, after a tiring flight, jolting drive and dashing run. “Hi, may I help you with your suitcase?” There he stood, a funny figure of 5 feet 2 in his sixties, wearing a tidy-looking suit and tie, smiling behind a reception desk. “Lawrence Grouse,” he held out his hand to me, “nice to see you!”

It was so comfortable to meet such an amiable, easy-going person far away from home. He was the organizer of that meeting in Italy, the first World Conference of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Patient Organizations. We got acquainted with each other and soon started to exchange our emails frequently on academic business. I was once invited to do the Chinese translation for the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (the GOLD Pocket Guide to COPD Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention) for which he helped with the publishing. He was so satisfied and happy with my job that he addressed me personally by younger brother, and I would call him back, Larry the ‘old chap’.

As time went on, I came to know that our old chap was in no sense a usual person like Tom, Dick, and Harry. He had been once the Senior Editor and Director of Scientific

Affairs at the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. He created the *JAMA* column “A Piece of My Mind” and as the column editor worked with hundreds of physicians seeking creative expression for their deeply-felt experiences in medicine. He was a founder of the National Lifetime Medical Television (LMT) network that reached half the physicians in the US and was the Vice President for Programming and Medical Affairs of LMT. For 11 years he managed its business and production. Since 1992 Dr. Grouse has been the Executive Director of international respiratory health initiatives founded in collaboration with the US National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization. It was around 2008, he became the Executive Director of the International COPD Coalition (ICC), a nonprofit organization composed of COPD patient organizations around the world, working together to improve the health and access to care of patients with COPD.

At that time, I was experiencing a hard time of *Journal of Thoracic Disease (JTD)* in the first few years of this newly founded publication. *JTD* was then still a toddler, neither indexed in PubMed Central yet, nor to mention inclusion in Web of Science. It had just gone through the dullest moments on its way to growth: no audience, no citations, and no “big papers”. All *JTD* had was a dream: an ambitious dream for the brilliant tomorrow, for becoming an efficient platform that bridges between clinicians and researchers, and to present cutting-edge information and education to our readers.

We were so excited about Prof. Grouse’s willingness to contribute a paper on rights of COPD patients to *JTD*,



Figure 1 Larry, and Nanshan sat together and discussed about the future plans of *Journal of Thoracic Disease (JTD)* and the meeting on Early COPD Diagnosis and Therapy: The Opportunity for Success.

which was highly praised by colleagues in the community of chronic respiratory diseases. His second paper came very soon after the first one (1), a commentary discussing COPD Patients' Rights (2). We still remember how rigorous he was about his own submission: inspired by the review comments, he added a lot of informative data, including additional cost materials from the COPD health economist, to elucidate his points appealing for attention to the rights and dignity of COPD patients. From his paper, we began to realize how limited we were, as journal editors in armchairs, about the needs and pains of patients suffering from chronic respiratory diseases. In his paper, he insisted that physicians should listen to the voices of patients rather than focus more on the side of pharmaceutical industries. "Our work at *JTD*, or our ultimate goal for the *JTD*," he told us, "should not just be to get good papers; the sacred mission of *JTD* is to benefit patients, to benefit people!"

In March 2012, shortly after *JTD* was indexed in PubMed Central, we invited Larry to join the editorial board of *JTD*, and he accepted our invitation without a second thought.

Larry greatly encouraged us by his action, in the hardest period of our striving for the survival of the *JTD*, for his practical suggestions and recommendations of experts to *JTD*, and for most important for his encouragement for us to stick to what we are doing. He tried his best, and took full advantage of available resources he could manage, to make *JTD* a world-reputed scientific publication.

Around August 2012, Larry became the associate Editor-in-chief to *JTD*. Soon the ICC endorsed *JTD* with a regular column named "ICC Column: the voice of the patient",

which provides scientific evidence and perspective to the physicians of the world to benefit COPD patients with the global efforts of COPD patient organizations to work with lung physicians and experts to deal with the global COPD epidemic (3). Since then, the voices for patients have been enhanced, and these voices have been known by more and more physicians, urging them to listen to the heart of patients, to respect patients in great humanity besides medical science. Larry has organized so many influential papers from his colleagues, including a paper discussing the activities and differences between respiratory patient organizations from developed and developing countries (4), and a survey conducted by ICC on activities of national respiratory patient organizations globally in their proposing and implementing improvements in respiratory disease prevention and treatment (5).

He had been always firmly standing with us, for any tough moments we encountered on the way of *JTD*'s growth. In April this year, Larry visited the editorial office of *JTD* and had a good time together with all of us. We saw an old gentleman with reddish brown hairs in a black suit and white shirt. He appeared a funny-looking figure that had never changed after so many years. There was an important liaison meeting between ICC, *JTD*, and the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease (*Figure 1*). Larry shared generously his thoughts on the future development and strategies of *JTD*. He discussed with Prof. Nanshan Zhong about the time to hold a conference on Early COPD Diagnosis and Therapy: The Opportunity for Success in November 2017. According to Prof. Zhong and Larry, COPD must be diagnosed early so that our clinicians could deliver effective therapy to the victims before symptoms become significant. This would result in better cost-effectiveness and patient welfares. He had a number of messages from COPD patient organization partners who were eager to work on the 2017 meeting, and would meet those colleagues at the forthcoming annual meeting of American Thoracic Society (ATS), and discuss about the details of the conference to be held in 2017.

We were delighted about this. We set about immediately to plan for all communications and preparations for the next 16 months. We even dreamed of our laughter when we meet in 2017. But we never knew that was an unrequited dream.

Larry was expected to show up at the exhibition booth of *JTD* where we were staying at the ATS 2016, but he did not. Leaders from ICC patient groups came to the booth ask for him but in vain. Our inquiry emails were not

answered. It was not like Larry who had been always on time for everything in life. There came the message that he was unwell. We had been praying for him. However, the subsequent communications from him became scarce, delayed and brief. After an unbearably long waiting, awful news came from his family, like a bolt out of the blue. It took a while for us to accept the truth about the passing of our old chap, beloved Prof. Lawrence Grouse, who left in such a hurry.

Over the past weeks, we were in great sorrows. At one time or another, we could not help refreshing our email, with some fake hope to receive a message from Larry.

“Hey, I just wanna kidding all of you...”

“They were asking how we plan for next year’s meeting, and I told them not to worry, because Nanshan and all of you would see to all of it...”

We buried our head deep in our hands.

“I know that all of you have been so keen in making *JTD* a successful publication. I would be very happy to work to continue this great progress...”

“Hold on. It could be very difficult at the very beginning, but you all have me at the corner...”

Some of us gave a sob.

For several occasions in the midnight, I would see him stood there. “Hi, may I help you with your suitcase?” he held out his hand to me, “nice to see you, again!”

“Hi! Larry...”

I sat up from my bed, only to found tears rolling down my cheeks amidst the helpless darkness. There will be no longer any see-you-again, I know, while we proceed with

our passions for the journal publishing and patient benefits. But, the old chap’s voices would continue to reverberate in our hearts.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Tina Pei, Rebecca Wong, and Connie Chen. Condolence goes to Dr. Lawrence Grouse’s family and those whom he loved.

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Cite this article as: Zeng G; on behalf of Journal of Thoracic Disease. Voices that ever reverberate—in memory of Dr. Prof. Lawrence Grouse. *J Thorac Dis* 2016;8(8):1846-1848. doi: 10.21037/jtd.2016.07.70