

A Woman of Valor



On Tuesday, January 19, 2010, Dr. Keyhan (Kay) Farian died at the age of 80, after being struck by an SUV in front of her home in Nyack, New York. Her name may not be familiar to the majority of *EM* readers, but for 40 years Dr. Farian was more important to the people of the South Bronx, New York, than the nine presidents of the United States who served during that time. Kay was important to our specialty of emergency medicine as well.

Keyhan Farian was born and raised in Iran, the second of seven sisters in a prominent family. At a time when arranged marriages were more typical there, Kay attended college and medical school at Tehran University before coming to the United States in the 1950s. After working in outpatient clinics in Massachusetts and then the South Bronx, Kay completed an internal medicine residency there at Lincoln Hospital, where she remained a member of the attending physician staff for the next 40 years until her retirement in 2003.

In the late 1970s, when emergency medicine was becoming a specialty, Kay recognized the enormous need to provide high-quality emergency care to one of the largest underserved populations in the country, and though already in her 50s, she began to devote all of her efforts to emer-

gency medicine and the ED of Lincoln Hospital. Dr. Farian became a board-certified emergency physician in 1987, and in 1996, at the age of 67, she recertified—a year after obtaining a master of public health degree from New York Medical College.

In the more than 20 years that Dr. Farian spent in emergency medicine, she held leadership positions as associate, deputy, and acting director of the Lincoln Hospital emergency department, acting director of its emergency medicine residency program, and participant, supervisor, or chair of a variety of local, citywide and state EMS groups.

But the whole of Dr. Farian's accomplishments is much greater than the sum of her individual achievements. Perhaps because it is a young specialty without a history of gender bias or male predominance, or perhaps because of its lifestyle factors, emergency medicine has been an attractive career path for women in medicine. But that began only after Kay Farian created her own path. An Iranian-born physician and mother of two children, determined to ensure that some of the poorest and most disadvantaged citizens of her newly adopted country received the best emergency care possible—unheard of! Moreover, though no one had ever known Kay to back down from a demand for needed re-

sources and care for her patients, she also played a key role in keeping her emergency physician colleagues from endangering their own positions by pushing too hard, or in the wrong direction, or at the wrong time. Expressed in the current vernacular, she “had their backs.”

There are currently about 26,000 board-certified emergency physicians in the United States, of whom the vast majority now are residency

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trained. But as those in the generation of pioneering emergency physicians, who emigrated from older specialties to create and nurture a new discipline, complete their professional careers in the coming years, it will be important to remember Dr. Kay Farian. Friendly, gentle, determined, she lived her life the way she chose to. She never stopped learning, never stopped teaching, and never stopped caring. A hero and role model, Kay Farian was a woman of valor who will be very much missed by all who knew her. □