



Correspondence

Homage for Hagop Souren Akiskal (1944-2021): Former co-Editor-in Chief of the Journal of Affective Disorders, a world-known charismatic psychiatrist and a creative researcher in mood disorders

Hagop Soren Akiskal (16 January 1944, Beirut, Lebanon - 20 January 2021, La Jolla, CA) – Fig. 1 - is not among us anymore. Psychiatrists and admirers from all over the world mourn his loss with great sadness. His new classical works on mood disorders, mainly on chronic depression and bipolar disorder, were based on keen clinical insight, refined psychopathological knowledge, and a large clinical experience. Although some critics might question some of his concepts and conclusions, Hagop Akiskal was greatly respected and admired by colleagues for the rigorous way he applied Kraepelin's method to the complex issue of the classification of mood disorders.

Hagop Akiskal was born in Lebanon to Armenian parents and was very proud of this heritage. He received his M.D. from the American University of Beirut in 1969 and completed his residency training in psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Hagop Akiskal worked for several years as a clinician and mood disorders researcher at the University of Tennessee, Memphis, USA. There he established the first specialized mood clinic in the US, renowned for combining cutting-edge research with high-quality care. His clinical expertise ranged from dysthymia to bipolar spectrum disorders and included psychiatric comorbidities, treatment-resistant depression, the interface of personality with mood disorders, mixed states, anxiety disorders, and bipolarity.

Hagop Akiskal was a senior science advisor at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) from 1990–1994, before moving to the University of California, San Diego, where he became professor of psychiatry for a quarter of a century. He was one of the leading conceptual thinkers in the area of bipolar subtyping and his work has been highly influential in recent developments in diagnostic classifications in psychiatry. It is worth remembering, however, the critical role played by Hagop Akiskal even before the concept of a bipolar spectrum gained acceptance. It was thanks in part to his studies that the DSM-III finally abolished the century-old opposition between neurotic and endogenous or psychotic depression. Later, in an article on chronic depressions, Hagop Akiskal (1983) coined the term dysthymia, thus opening an entirely new venue for diagnosing and pharmacologically treating mild and chronic depressions (which were no longer considered “neurotic”). His research on cyclothymia and other subthreshold mood disorders enlarged the boundaries of bipolar disorders and helped foster his worldwide reputation as a masterful clinical researcher.

The temperament field, one of the earliest and more fertile areas of Psychiatry, going back to the works of Hippocrates, Theophrastus, and Galen, was revived in the first half of the 20th century thanks to Kraepelin and Kretschmer. But it was Hagop Akiskal who brought the affective temperaments to the attention of the generation of psychiatrists trained under the DSM III, developed a classification and diagnostic criteria, and created the TEMPS-A, a psychometrically sound instrument

to measure them.

Hagop Akiskal's original work gained recognition across the globe. He received numerous awards, as the Gold Medal for Pioneer Research (from the Society of Biological Psychiatry), the Anna Monika Prize for Depression Research (in Germany), the NARSAD Prize for Affective Disorders, the 2002 Jean Delay Prize for international collaborative research (from the World Psychiatric Association), as well as the Jules Baillarger (in France) and the Aretaeus (in Italy) prizes for his research on the bipolar spectrum. In 2003, he received the coveted Ellis Island Medal of Honor “for the significant contributions to the life of this nation”.

Hagop Akiskal made disciples, collaborators, friends, and admirers everywhere he traveled, including Brazil. He came several times to our country to participate in the Brazilian Congress of Psychiatry and his lectures are still fondly remembered. Hagop Akiskal was a prolific author and published many papers with his Brazilian partners (Akiskal et al., 2005; de Carvalho et al., 2013; de Carvalho et al. 2015; Mendlowicz et al. 2005a Mendlowicz et al. 2005b; Mendlowicz et al. 2000; Velasques et al. 2013; Woodruff et al. 2011). He was the editor of several academic journals and served as the co-Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Affective Disorders for many years. During his period as co-Editor-in-Chief the Journal of Affective Disorders became one of the most important journals for mood disorder researchers. Hagop Akiskal was also an art lover and collected works by local artists of the countries he visited.

Longfellow wrote that “When a great man dies, for years the light he leaves behind him, lies on the paths of men”. Hagop Akiskal was one of the most creative clinical researchers in psychiatry and his major contributions to the field of mood disorders will not be forgotten by future generations of psychiatrists. He was also a generous person, always willing to go out of his way to help young people. We lost a master and a friend. But the many teachings, the examples, and, ultimately, the light of this good man, devoted doctor, masterful teacher, and innovative scientist will stay with us forever.

Contributors

The first author and all coauthors had some personal and professional relationship with Professor Akiskal. The first author wrote the first draft of this manuscript and all the coauthors wrote some addition in the text, corrected some references, included some personal data. We all had the same participation in writing the manuscript.

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Fig. 1. HagopSourenAkiskal (1944–2021).

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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