

Dr. Hassan Azim

February 1, 1932 – July 11, 2023

Dr. Hassan Azim, a distinguished Training Analyst of the Western Branch (WCPSI), passed away peacefully in Victoria, B.C., where he moved to be close to family towards the end of his life. Dr. Azim's sixty-year career as an analyst spanned the country, beginning in Montreal in 1961 when he began his training in analysis and became the first analytic candidate in Canada, and continuing through Edmonton and Vancouver where he made significant contributions to psychoanalytic psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

In addition to teaching and supervising psychoanalytic candidates and psychoanalytic psychotherapists through the Western branch, Dr. Azim was an Honorary Professor in the UBC Department of Psychiatry, teaching psychodynamic psychotherapy and providing valuable support to other UBC faculty members in their supervisory work. His lectures were prized by residents and candidates for the accessible way in which he shared his clinical knowledge and encouraged creative and critical reflection. More recently, Dr. Azim continued his teaching by sharing his expertise through the China America Psychoanalytic Alliance.

Dr. Azim has an outstanding record of rich clinical and academic experience, expertise, and accomplishment beginning in Cairo where he was one of the first psychiatrists in Egypt. Dr. Azim studied medicine in English at the American University, and, in addition, completed a Bachelor of Education. He was the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship in 1955 and continued through many distinguished clinical appointments and scholarly contributions including having a graduate award named in his honor.

After having run group psychotherapy programs at the Allen Memorial Institute in Montreal, Dr. Azim moved to Edmonton, where he led one of the most productive Canadian centers for psychotherapy research, producing more than two dozen peer-reviewed journal articles. In 1991 Dr. Azim published the Quality of Object Relations Scale, an interview-based assessment procedure that has been crucial for several ground-breaking studies of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and which has been cited more than 150 times. His research was pivotal in examining patient factors and therapeutic processes—such as transference interpretations—that contribute to successful psychodynamic treatment.

Dr. Azim taught and worked from his theory that interpretations are not effective without a therapeutic relationship, stating, “interpretation feeds relationship and relationship feeds interpretation.” Dr. Azim did not believe in analytic neutrality, emphasizing instead that the analyst must not side with any one part of the self. He believed it was essential to analyze both conflict and deprivation, that drives are ‘satisfied’ through expression, and that containment is provided in analysis by “letting it happen” and by experiencing the ensuing depression.

Dr. Azim spoke openly about death, including his own. He believed that death was the only certainty, and that the analytic couple faces the intrapsychic reality of the analyst’s death and the patient’s death in the process of termination. He postulated that patients may prematurely end therapy in a bid to avoid death, including their fear of the death of the relationship.

Dr. Azim coauthored three books on topics such as the treatment of complicated grief, intensive treatment of personality disorders, and the use of interpretive and supportive techniques in psychotherapy. His service has included board membership of the American Group Psychotherapy Association and presidency of the Alberta and British Columbia psychiatric associations.

Dr. Hassan Azim was a beloved and effective mentor and supervisor appreciated for his wisdom, patience, and warmth. He was passionate about psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy, and deeply committed to the professional growth of trainees, and to the development of subsequent generations of clinicians. Dr. Azim generously shared his knowledge while encouraging others to form their own views and establish their own style. He demonstrated a persistent inquisitiveness and open-mindedness—showing an embrace of complexity and providing an inspiring model of humility. His humanistic model of psychoanalysis will be gratefully remembered by the analytic community in Western Canada.

Respectfully submitted,
Coleen Gold,
David Kealy,
Catherine Young