

Guest Editor : Vrajesh Udani

EDITORIAL

It is indeed a rare privilege to be the guest editor of this fest-schrift dedicated to the late Professor Prabhakar Maganlal Udani. One of the founding fathers of Indian pediatrics, Professor Udani passed on in January 2002 at the age of 83. He was a towering figure in Indian pediatrics for close to 50 years and was responsible for the nurturing of many a pediatrician, including myself.

Professor Udani came from humble beginnings. He was born in Vicchia, a small village in Saurashtra. His father was a local doctor in Rajkot who served in World War I and was a role model for the young Prabhakar. He arrived in Bombay in the late 1930s and after a stint at St. Xavier's College he entered Grant Medical College and the JJ Group of Hospitals, the second oldest medical school in India. He finished his MBBS and did his post graduation in internal medicine - there was no MD in pediatrics at the time. He gravitated towards pediatrics under the influence of the late Professor George Coelho and later the late Professor R. R. Sanzgiri. After his residency he joined the department as part of the faculty at the BJ Hospital for children at the JJ Hospital. He often recalled the grand old days when residents were on call 24/7 and had to use mainly clinical skills, as even X-rays were a luxury (he often told us stories about how there were only about 2-3 dozen X-rays allowed each month in the whole hospital till the late Morarji Desai intervened). This is where he probably developed his legendary clinical acumen, which enabled him to diagnose conditions just by the child's posture, facies or even the quality of the cry. After Professor Coelho's retirement in the early 1950s he took over the Department of Pediatrics and steered it through many an achievement till his retirement in the late 1970s. He was an honorary - however he worked 'whole-time' in JJ from morning to late evenings every day and practiced in his private rooms only after 7 p.m. till the wee hours of the morning. He spent his day in building the Institute of Child Health at the JJ, establishing teaching programs for both postgraduates (I remember 20-30 post graduates during the "sitting rounds" on Wednesday which would go on for several hours far beyond lunchtime) and undergraduates (the clinico-social, clinico-pathological, clinico-psychological and other meetings were unique as they gave us an opportunity to speak and present to a large audience). He coordinated teaching with other departments especially the neuroscience department where he worked with the late Professor Darab Dastur (those long brain-cutting sessions!), the internationally renowned neuropathologist. The WHO recognised his

contributions and for several years the ICH at the JJ Hospital was an international training center for pediatricians from the developing world.

His patients and their parents adored him. He would examine the most irritable baby and have him soon smiling and happy. Parents would do whatever he asked and many a time when the child died they would allow an autopsy willingly.

His seminal contributions to the medical literature were mainly in neurotuberculosis especially the clinical features, atypical presentations and the neuropathology of TBM based on a huge number of autopsies, and these propelled him into the scientific limelight in the early 1970s when they were published in several international journals including the *Journal of Neuroscience*. His work on neurotuberculosis won him international acclaim and he lectured extensively from countries as far as Japan and Columbia. He received several national / international awards like the Purkinje Award in Czechoslovakia, B C Roy National Award and the Birla Smarak Kosh Award for his contributions to research and teaching in pediatrics. He also published several papers on the effects of PEM on the brain and muscle and worked on diarrhoeal disease. Most of his research was concentrated on 'our' problems, as he believed that the problems of developing countries had to be sorted out here rather than in the western world. His lifework was consolidated in a voluminous textbook of pediatrics, which he edited and where the focus was on the problems of India and the developing world. The textbook had more than a 100 contributors and the work was revised and re-revised for a decade before he was satisfied and allowed its publication in 1991.

His lasting contribution, I feel, is in his training and nurturing of several pediatricians who now span the globe. A few of these the illustrious have become stalwarts in their own fields and have come together in this fest-schrift to pay tribute to their teacher. Professor Bhim Singhal worked as his houseman for 6 months and went on to become one of India's best-known neurologists. His article on Megalencephalic Leucodystrophy with Subcortical Cysts, a disease described by him in the Indian Agarwal community is the culmination of work that started at the bedside and ended at finding the mutant gene. Professor Narsingh Kumta worked as Professor Udani's registrar at JJ Hospital and went on to organize a premier metabolic unit at the K.E.M. Hospital in Mumbai. He contributes his work on the inborn errors of metabolism in this issue. Professor

Vrajesh Udani

Yeshwant Amdekar was Professor Udani's registrar and continues the legacy of teaching to this day. He is probably the most well known name in the pediatric fraternity. He has helped consolidate many a career including mine and we are forever grateful. He has worked on rationalizing our ideas on tuberculosis and the host response as well as on rational drug therapy in pediatrics. His article reviews the various aspects of tuberculosis in the developing world from basic science to public health issues. Professor Ashok Sarnaik who worked with Professor Udani as his registrar at JJ Hospital is now one of the authorities in pediatric intensive care in the USA and runs his own state of the art unit at the Children's Hospital, Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. His contemplative article straddles the realms of medicine, ethics and philosophy and optimizes these principles to the management of the patient in intensive care. Professor Sharda Sarnaik, ex-house-officer to Professor Udani now heads the section on Sickle Cell disease at the Children's Medical Center, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. She reviews hemoglobinopathies, an area of her interest for several years. Dr Rajeshree Udani Singhania works in Dubai as a developmental pediatrician. She has done her PhD in developmental pediatrics and in autism from the University of London in the UK and is considered an

authority on this subject. She has followed in Professor Udani's footsteps (she is his daughter after all) in her zeal for research and reads as voraciously as our late father. She has written a state of the art review on the autistic disorders. Professor Udani influenced me profoundly both as a teacher and a parent and piqued my interest in neurology in my undergraduate days.

Professor Udani taught all of us about the need to work hard and tirelessly and without the expectation of material gains; he taught us that we need to approach our country's problems first with a clear questioning mind and not be afraid of treading a different path; he taught us to be perpetual students like himself. He would read voraciously, underline whole textbooks and journals and sit in the first row of every conference jotting down points. He considered pediatrics a 'religion' and 'service to children' his only goal in life. We salute this giant of a man and pray that his legacy lives on.

Vrajesh Udani
*P.D. Hinduja National Hospital
and Medical Research Center,
V.S. Marg, Mahim, Mumbai
Fax : 91-22-440425
E-mail : vrajesh@vsnl.com*