

Obituary

Prof. Balu Sankaran



Prof. Balu Sankaran (1926-2012)

Penning down the obituary of my mentor Prof. Balu Sankaran, who left us for his heavenly abode on 20th of June 2012, is like writing the vibrant growth of orthopedic surgery in India for the past 50 years of which he was a great part.

It is like paying tribute to the great human characters of tenacity of purpose, hard work, and simplicity yet dynamicity to achieve the ultimate. It is like depicting how a teacher, a surgeon, a clinician, a research worker, an administrator, a loving husband and father, and an understanding colleague should be, all in one.

Dr. Balu Sankaran was born in a family of doctors in Chennai in 1926. He graduated from Stanley Medical College, and was the recipient of 17 prizes, which still remains a record for MBBS degree. He did his residency program in orthopedic surgery at the prestigious Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre, USA, and passed his FRCS (Canada) in orthopedics, the first Indian to do so. He had the privilege of working with Sir. John Charley and David Lyod Griffith in UK for a year.

His love to serve his own people brought him back to India and he joined the AIIMS in New Delhi in 1956. He rose to be a Professor in the institute, Head of the Department of Orthopedics in Maulana Azad Medical College, Director of Central Institute of Orthopedics, and then the Director General of Health Services, Government of India. The WHO, recognizing his work, appointed him the Regional

Director at Geneva for a period of 5 years. After retirement he rendered his free service as a surgeon, teacher, and advisor at the St. Stephen, New Delhi, for more than a decade.

The awards and decorations he received including the Padma Vibushan by Government of India, his publications, the research work he had undertaken, his orations, his original work on osteoporosis in India and on postpolio residual paralysis, his efforts in rehabilitation as the Director of ALIMCO, Kanpur, and his setting up of the 17 peripheral centers in the country stand a testimony to the vision of this great man. He did not have any money or properties to fall back upon when he retired, but he had the treasury of the talent of his students all round the world carrying on his vision, his discipline of work, and the thirst to achieve the best.

He was survived by his wife and three children. He was a perfect family man. His wife, Madam Sukanya Sankaran, is an encyclopedia of orthopedics by herself. She knew each one of Dr. Balu's students by name and the thesis work they did. His three children, Suhasini, Nirmala, and Karthik, have done extremely well in their life and settled in United States.

Men like Professor Balu Sankaran can never die. They leave behind their footsteps in the sands of time for people to remember that here was a man, a man among all men, teacher among all teachers, surgeon among all surgeons. Dr. Balu Sankaran was a gift of God to this world and I thank God for making it possible for all of us to be a part of his life.

May his soul rest in peace.

By his loving student

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