

REPORT

The first National Award for Medical Humanities in Indore: A report

SUNIL K PANDYA

Introduction

Dr Apoorva Pauranik¹, retired Professor of Neurology and Consultant Neurophysician from the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College (MGMMC) and the affiliated Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar Hospital (MYH) in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, is the Director of Pauranik Academy of Medical Education.

Dr. Pauranik has initiated a new venture – the inculcation of the pursuit of the humanities by medical students and professionals in his state. Towards this end, he has set up a national award of Rs. 50,000 along with a plaque of honour to an Indian physician who is doing outstanding work in this field. At the same time, Dr Pauranik has also established another prize to promote medical research in Indore.

While sharing the thought process behind the establishment of twin awards, one for humanities and the other for medical research, Dr Pauranik pointed out that arts and sciences are like two wheels of a chariot, both being necessary. He emphasised the essentiality and centrality of hardcore science which forms the bedrock for evidence-based medical practice.

National Award for Work in Fostering the Medical Humanities

Dr Ravi Ramakantan (who retired as the Professor and Head of the Department of Radiology at the Seth GS Medical College and KEM. Hospital, Mumbai) was the chairperson of the selection committee for this award.

Dr Mario Vaz, professor of Physiology, St John's Medical College and Head, Health and Humanities, St John's Research Institute, Bengaluru, received the first award for his work in the humanities on November 2, 2019, at MGMMC and MY Hospital, Indore.

Dr Mario Vaz's acceptance speech

In his acceptance speech Dr Vaz pointed to the great tradition

of eminent and altruistic doctors in India but expressed regret that medical education in India has remained isolated in its unidimensional domain. Ideally, like all university education, it should be multidisciplinary and interactive. He stressed the need to bridge the divide between humanities and medicine. He expressed the hope that study of the humanities will make medical students better human beings and better doctors. Unfortunately, the humanities have been conspicuous by their absence from the medical curriculum in India. It is sad that even the recent revision of the curriculum by MCI, does not once mention the word "humanities".

Dr Vaz enumerated the reasons for inclusion of humanities in medical education. They nurture the qualities of insight, vetting context, broadening perspective and adaptability. These, in turn, lead to humane care of the patient. Dr Vaz outlined the several stages in the evolution of a discipline, medical humanities being no exception. The process starts with the germination of ideas and continues into their practice.

Medical schools in many countries have developed programmes in the medical humanities with measurable and meaningful outcomes. It is a matter of shame that such an important concept has not caught the imagination of medical educationists in India. Dr Vaz thanked Dr Apoorva Pauranik and his Academy for Medical Education and hoped that the latter would encourage diversity of thought and forms of enquiry.

Indore Annual Award for Medical Publication

Dr Pauranik has set up another prize of Rs 25,000 to recognise the publication of good medical research, in any branch of the medical sciences, by a doctor based in Indore, during the preceding three years. A national level selection committee, chaired by Dr Kameshwar Prasad, Professor of Neurology at AIIMS, New Delhi, chose Dr Anand Ajmera, Professor of Orthopaedics at M.G.M. Medical College, for his research on the management of clubfoot

Humane medical research - a talk by me during this session

A talk on humane medical research followed. The essential need for all medical research to be grounded in the principles of humanism was emphasised. No great scientist has done research to advance his own career or gain renown. These are unsought byproducts of unrelenting effort. Research as a road to riches is a chimera.

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The evolution of medical research over the centuries has included many dark and shameful patches when scientists failed to keep the interests of the participants in the forefront. The Tuskegee experiment was but one example.

The need for investigators to provide full information to participants before obtaining their consent, address their misgivings, allay anxiety and treat them with kindness was emphasised. The Nobel Committee for this year's prize in medicine and physiology, applauded the winners' scientific rigor of the highest order coupled with their humility. These characteristics made them role models.

Such researchers carried out their research not to pamper their egos, or obtain degrees or accolades, or to amass publications or promotions. The urge for and temperament for research is propelled in them by the quest for knowledge and seeking answers to valid and relevant questions. Apart from the linear, logical deductive qualities of the left cerebral hemisphere, successful research also needs a good mix of qualities of the right hemisphere ie lateral thinking, parallel processing, indirect, innovative and creative approach, eclectic and out of the box thinking.

Medical practitioners and researchers alike would do well to apply the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi on the essentials of medical research.

- *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) – in thought, word and deed
- Honesty and sincerity as regards both purpose and the means for conducting the study
- Respect for the participant
- Doing everything possible to avoid needless suffering, even to animals.

Gandhiji had concluded by saying that it is a sin to practise science without humanity.

Note

I had written an essay in this journal regarding an attempt to tarnish Dr Pauranik's name (See: <https://ijme.in/articles/tarnishing-reputations-the-downside-of-medical-activism/?galley=html>)

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