

OBITUARY

Dr Ramalingam Sankaran (1960 – 2021) – a noble soul

VASANTHA MUTHUSWAMY

Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget.

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Dr Ramalingam, lovingly known to all of us as Ram, an eminent clinical pharmacologist and bioethicist, excelled in his role of Principal and Dean of PSG Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, (PSGIMSR) Coimbatore, and as a human being, in his dealings with his peers and students.

A medical graduate from Coimbatore Medical College in 1985, he continued his pursuit of knowledge with an MD in Pharmacology from Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, followed by training in Clinical Pharmacology at Stanford University, and the University of California, USA, and from Queensland, Australia. He trained in medical education through a FAIMER Fellowship in the USA, which helped him to hold many prestigious positions in PSG, where he was both the Principal, promoting good medical education, and Dean of the hospital, providing exemplary medical services. He was loved by the faculty as well as students for his friendly, no nonsense approach, which endeared him to all.

I had the privilege to know him from 2007, when he joined our ICMR-NIH six-week Bioethics course organised at St. John's Medical College, Bengaluru, as a trainee. He was already Principal of PSG Medical College, and we were apprehensive about his fitting into a trainee's role among those so much younger and junior to him. His eagerness to initiate a Bioethics programme at his college forced us to concede to his request. I didn't realise then that this was to be the beginning of a long-lasting relationship working together to develop vigorous Bioethics activities at Coimbatore, where I ultimately settled after my long tenure at ICMR, New Delhi. In that process, I developed a strong personal bond of love and friendship with him, which has lasted till date and will continue in my memories of him till my last day. Ram became a close family friend, and was like a younger brother to me.

During the ICMR-NIH Bioethics course, he impressed his fellow trainees with his pleasant demeanour and extensive



knowledge, which brought them close to him. He continued to maintain contact with almost all these trainees and faculty members while establishing a strong Clinical Research and Bioethics Centre, in 2009. He also set up the PSG Centre for Molecular Medicine and Therapeutics, with great support from his wife, Dr Sudha Ramalingam.

He requested me to be an Advisor on ethics in 2009, and I cannot forget his untiring personal efforts, with Dr Sudha, to set up the Centre for Clinical Research and Bioethics, and put in place a well-functioning institutional ethics committee of a standard to achieve

recognition in 2012 under the Strategic Initiative for Developing Capacity in Ethical Review - Forum for Ethical Review Committees in the Asian and Western Pacific (SIDCER FERCAP). He organised the Second Forum for Ethics Review Committees in India (FERCI) annual conference in 2013, and initiated the PG Diploma in Bioethics under Bharathiar University in 2015, the first of its kind in the country, benefitting many youngsters wanting to learn bioethics. He had the vision to expand the horizons of PSGIMSR in the emerging technologies. He could have achieved so much more had cruel fate not snatched him away from us prematurely.

A rare combination of financial acumen, dedication to teaching, and scientific vision, Dr Ramalingam managed to get funding from all the agencies to improve the infrastructure and research output of the institute. He was an excellent teacher, using pun and humour in conveying his views, be it on clinical trials, or other pharmacological research and bioethics. He trained several young professionals in pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic (PK PD) modelling and was the Founder President of PAGIN- Population Approach Group in India. Immensely dedicated to his work, he pursued his duties even during the last few months when he was very ill.

More important than the academician and administrator in Dr Ramalingam, were his human qualities which made him so lovable, respectful and endearing to all those who came in close contact with him. His child-like innocent smile, his honest and sincere interactions, his utter simplicity, his dedication to the values he believed in, which he sincerely followed till the end, made him the great soul that he was.

I am sure the Centre will continue the activities he cherished so much. His love and blessings and the role model that he was should motivate others in the years to come, to implement his dreams in their future achievements. His physical presence amongst us will be missed very much, but his loving personality can never be forgotten.

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