

INTRODUCTION

Dr Sunil K Pandya: a meaningful and richly productive life

What makes a person who is an established neurosurgeon, a respected professor and ethical practitioner, feel the need to enter the additional and unknown arena of activism? The urge to create awareness of the need for ethical practice, the readiness to accept challenges and speak truth to power in the increasingly commercial environment of the 1990s are what set Dr Sunil K Pandya (SKP) apart from other honest and ethical doctors of the time. In his own words, "I do not wish to exist without a meaningful and productive life."

Not only did SKP and a small group of colleagues throw themselves into engaging with their students and co-workers, they challenged the medical associations and the top regulatory bodies such as ICMR, MCI, analysing through an ethics lens every policy and document that emerged from these authorities. SKP was the Founder Editor of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics (IJME)*, in all its avatars, and stayed an enthusiastic and organic part of the journal over the next thirty-two years. In the early years, he and Anil Pilgaonkar spent hours after work inviting authors to write, typing up articles, coordinating with the typesetter, dealing with the printer, and often paying for the printing themselves. Yet no issue was ever delayed or skipped, as noted by Sanjay Nagral in an Obituary in *The Hindustan Times*. In this, they were ably supported by Satish Kulkarni, who did the typesetting for free, and others.

SKP chose to step down as Editor of *IJME* in 1999, and stuck to a policy of non-interference in its day-to-day functioning and policies, even when he had misgivings. This is, in itself, a rare quality among founders. He continued to take up activities related to ethics in medicine, and encourage others to do so. SKP wrote frequently in this journal and others. We were fortunate to have him write the Editorial commemorating the 30th anniversary year of *IJME's* existence, perhaps a milestone no one would have imagined possible in those early days. Quite recently, he congratulated FMES on the 40th issue of its fortnightly newsletter, on doing a "marvelous job" of keeping interested readers informed.

Very much a "people person", SKP was happy to meet anyone interested in the cause of ethics, welcoming all of us who joined *IJME* in any capacity, and taking great delight in people's unusual hobbies or interests. As a close friend has said, "he was humble, and interested in everything and everyone". Literature, especially the English and European classics, the Medical Humanities, the History of Medicine, and Gandhian principles, all fascinated him.

SKP's deep interest in the history of medicine led him to research and write a book titled *Medical Education in Western India: Grant Medical College and Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy's Hospital*, described by MK Mani in *The Hindu* (of March 11, 2019), as "a gripping account of how these administrators, doctors and philanthropists united to develop a great institution, sometimes having to overcome prejudice and resistance from other officials of the East India Company."

SKP also gave lectures on the history of Grant Medical College, at the college.

His vigorous commitment to medicine and to the furthering of knowledge led him to donate his body for research to the Anatomy Department of the GS Medical College, Mumbai. The decision had been made years ago, but he was anxious that it should be implemented by his family. And so, he went "gentle into that good night", on December 17, 2024, with dignity and generosity, right till the end.

In this tribute, we present the personal reminiscences of close colleagues about the man himself, his felicitation by *IJME* in 2010, and a selection of his writings in the journal, arranged chronologically, in the original format. Readers can see the changing appearance of *IJME* through three decades. However, the issues covered in SKP's writing, from the doctor-patient relationship to the functioning of regulatory bodies, from the need for second opinions to that for revamping medical education, are all live issues even today, and the points he makes remain very relevant. Some debates, such as those on determination of brain death and testing every patient for AIDS, hotly debated at the time, are still evolving.

Through this online volume, we honour SKP, our Founder Editor and moving spirit for over a quarter century. He will be sorely missed by his family, friends and former students, and his extended family at *IJME*, the Forum for Medical Ethics Society (FMES), Research and Humanities in Medical Education (*RHiME*), and St John's Medical College. But his contributions to ethical medical care and to building the fledgling discipline of medical ethics and bioethics in India will survive well into the future.

Meenakshi D'Cruz.