

Memories of SKP

I met Sunil Pandya only twice in my life: in 2014, at a meeting on medical education in Karamsad, Gujarat, and in 2017, when he came to Mangalore to deliver a talk on our forgotten heritage in medical ethics at an Ethics Conference. Of course, I was his admirer, having read his "Letters from Mumbai" and knowing about his key role in founding and running the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, which is now a journal and institution we can be proud of. He was an exemplar in how, in a public hospital, he ran a surgical service focused on the patient and high quality.

I was privileged to have had a lively email correspondence with him over the past 15 months, which I will always treasure. Sunil made me drop the prefix Dr in our first email. He inspired me to write the column "Letter from Mangalore" in the *National Medical Journal of India*. I was surprised to find him respond with words of genuine appreciation the very day a piece on lack of clinical skills appeared. He signed off with the sentence, "I look forward to learning from many more such letters - and by other means as well." I have never received such a letter from a person 25 years my senior and without a trace of affectation. I realised that we shared a love of books, of the history of the profession, and the men of medicine- the writings of William Osler and Harvey Cushing, Lewis Thomas, Jacob Bronowski, Kenneth Clark, and the lives of Indian stalwarts like Jivraj Mehta, and CG Pandit. It was my privilege to source some books for him that he wanted to read. He requested a soft copy of the book *Intoxicated by My Illness: And Other Writings on Life and Death* by Anatole Broyard, a profoundly reflective book written in the terminal phase of the author's illness.

I was unaware of his illness till at the end of October. In a prompt but brief email response, he mentioned almost parenthetically at the end, "I am seriously ill." I was stunned, and his response was stoic: "As they say, life has its peculiar turns and twists," and he ended this final note with best wishes to me. The reason he wanted to read the book by Broyard now dawned on me. I wanted to meet him during a visit to Mumbai but couldn't. I learned about many other facets of his personality and his influence on so many people after his death. Sunil was a great man, a good man, of uncommon simplicity, authenticity, and humility. He was a man of courage who lived and died according to his principles, of which he was a living embodiment. I have a deep sense of personal loss at his passing, but I am very grateful that, as for countless others of his patients, colleagues, and friends, his life touched mine.

--Anurag Bhargava, Professor of Medicine, and Head, Centre for Nutrition Studies, Yenepoya Medical College, Yenepoya (deemed) University, Mangalore.

I am writing this on behalf of my colleagues at the Division of Health and Humanities and the Department of the History of Medicine at St. John's Medical College, Bangalore, although I know that they have messages of their own.

I knew of Dr. Sunil Pandya before I actually met him. I had read his fascinating historical account of the Medical School in Goa. I knew that the number of doctors who were interested in the History of Medicine was relatively small and I wondered what it would be to meet him in person. This happened much sooner than I expected, when he visited us to review the archives that we had. I can still picture him in a light blue shirt, the boxes of the Major General SL Bhatia collection all open in front of - his water bottle close at hand. He would rise occasionally to take a photograph on his tiny digital camera. I recall his complete immersion in the archives. I did not know that this would all lead to a tome on the history of western medical education in Mumbai and in Grant Medical College in particular. But I was delighted to write a review on the book for *Current Science*. We shared a common passion for the History of Medicine - his was a more scholarly pursuit while I attempted to popularise the history of medicine through the Maj Gen SL Bhatia Museum of the History of Medicine.

I remember him for his generosity and kindness and his unstinting efforts to facilitate others. He introduced Dr Manjulika Vaz and me to the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai. And, over the years we have had a wonderful learning experience, thanks to him, interacting with Dr Badwe, the then Director, and Ms Nishu Goel, the Lead on the Patient-Navigator Programme.

I remember him for his insatiable curiosity. On one occasion he indicated an interest in visiting Dr Olinda Timms because he had read about her eclectic collection of bells from various countries and across India. We had a wonderful evening - but, the abiding thought is that there is wonder and learning in everything we encounter.

We did not know Sunil Pandya enough - but, we feel close to him. His gift of a large number of papers, clippings and books curated by my colleague Ms. Radhika Hegde, form the Sunil Pandya Collection at the archives at St. John's Research Institute. These are a constant reminder to us of the breadth of his interests and his scholarship but most importantly, of the man he was.

--- Mario Vaz, Former Head, Department of History of Medicine; Division of Health and Humanities, St. John's Medical College, Bangalore

I was joking (facilitating) a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop at the University of Chicago Center in Delhi, in November 2016, when I noticed a stranger sitting at a distance and keenly watching the proceedings. As is my practice, I walked over to him and invited him to participate in the theatre games and exercises with the other participants. I explained that a theatre workshop does not favour mere observation, and that everyone is encouraged to participate. He explained that although he would have loved to join, he was constrained to sit out because of a medical condition.

During the ensuing lunch break, we sought each other out and were soon engaged in conversation about the games and exercises. I was surprised by his understanding and depth of knowledge about the Medical (now Health) Humanities and about Theatre of the Oppressed, which I had until then assumed was a rather obscure form of theatre for most people. At a later session, he was introduced as a speaker, and I kicked myself when I discovered that I had unknowingly been talking to Dr Sunil Pandya, founder editor of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*. This is a journal that is the epitome of ethics just like its founding editor was. He later wrote: "What were my impressions as an observer? I was astonished at the ease with which the Theatre broke down barriers—hierarchical, social and personal."

That single chance encounter remains a lasting memory of the man, as unassuming and humble as anyone can be, whom I wish I had met much sooner and more often. Seldom has a single meeting left such a memorable impression on my mind. As we pay tribute to Dr Pandya today, I am reminded of the frailty of our existence, and of the fleeting serendipitous events that make living worthwhile.

--- **Navjeevan Singh**, former Director-Professor of Pathology, University College of Medical Sciences, University of Delhi, Delhi

I will miss him very much as he walked the talk in ethical clinical practice. They don't make many of his kind anymore.

And, I remember those days, 31 years ago, sitting in Dr Pandya's office. *IJME* started as *Medical Ethics*, and was nothing more than a newsletter.

And it survived, had highs and lows needing many cardio pulmonary resuscitations. Most of the times, Dr. Pandya would just pull out money from his own meagre KEM public hospital salary to bring out "just one more" issue.

----**Nobhojit Roy**, Chair of the Center for Leadership in Global Health, Kigali, Rwanda

My encounter with Dr Sunil Pandya occurred recently, after his retirement, on his visit to the Division of Health and Humanities at St John's Research Institute. He was here to explore Maj. Gen. Bhatia's archives for his book on the History of Medical Education in Western India. He was courteous and engaging, and I was attracted by the delight and enthusiasm he expressed at our work in the young Humanities Division and our plans for its growth.

I was a bit in awe, as his contributions, by this time, to both medicine and medical ethics were legendary. Further, he had just reviewed my recently published book *Biomedical Ethics*, in the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, in glowing terms. He may have sensed my diffidence because, though usually reserved, he spontaneously agreed to join us at my home for high tea.

He was the perfect guest, charming and appreciative. But it was my bell collection that caught his attention. He listened to the stories of their provenance and peculiarities, and insisted that I should publish an illustrated book on these "tiny wonders"!

I did not realise how serious he was until I began to receive regular e-mails from him with anecdotes and curated stories on the world's oldest bells, bells of World War II, ancient bell foundries, bell metals, bells in religious history and unique bell shapes. All these are now in a folder, awaiting their rightful place in a publication he believed in more than I did.

These last few years, we exchanged e-mails on bells and general topics, including his health, which taught me a lot about the man behind the legend; his eclectic taste and openness, committed to people and beautiful ideas, encouraging both with equal zeal. He took his role of mentor and guide seriously, and the outpouring of affection and loss at his death is unsurprising. In a world of diminishing medical role models of the widely-read, honourable professional genre, he will be greatly missed.

--- **Olinda Timms**, Adjunct Professor, Department of Health and Humanities at St. Johns Research Institute, Bengaluru

Dr. Sunil Pandya's presence at the SL Bhatia History of Medicine Museum was always special. When he walked into the archives, he brought with him not just his quiet, unassuming energy but also his boundless passion for the history of medicine. He would sit with the books and manuscripts for hours together, gently flipping through pages as though greeting old friends. For him, history wasn't just about events or dates—it was about the people, the ideas, and the legacies they left behind.

In December 2018 and again in 2022, boxes of meticulously covered books arrived from Mumbai, each book wrapped with care. This collection stands as a testament to Dr Pandya's interdisciplinary engagement with the medical sciences, history, and ethics, deeply rooted in his reflective practice of medicine. The catalogued collection now comprises approximately 350 rare classical books.

The collection is a treasure trove spanning various domains:

- the History of Medicine: Including rare works from the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Medical Education and Ethics: Offering insights into the evolving principles of care and instruction.
- Indian History, Neurosurgery, and Ephemera: Highlighting his diverse intellectual pursuits.

Among the highlights are salvaged books from the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, which Dr. Pandya rescued in the 1980s from a massive discard by the library of the Seth G. S. Medical College. These works, some gifted by British professors from the Grant Medical College or British Physicians in private medical practice in Bombay, were later passed on to Seth G S Medical College in 1925. Additionally, his personal Osler collection, journals from the Escola Medica in Goa containing rare historical accounts, and manuscripts related to this institution enrich the holdings. Dr. Pandya's collection also features ephemera and rare magazines such as Sandoz, Abbot, *Pulse*, and *Housecalls*, which blend medical history with superb historical essays and photographic archives. The discontinuation of *Housecalls*, he once remarked, left a gap in documenting the narratives of Indian medical colleges and eminent personalities—a void partially filled by his curated donations, which are now available for reference.

Reflecting on his collection at the Bhatia Museum and Archives, Dr Pandya wrote, "I am grateful that you will provide an admirable home for these old friends—loved and cherished over decades. In your library, they will be of use to many, many people." But for us, as curators, we are the ones who feel truly grateful—grateful for his trust, his remarkable generosity, and the unwavering passion he shared, which has greatly inspired us. Dr Pandya embraced the interconnectedness of disciplines. His collection embodies this ethos, offering a lens into how history, ethics, and the humanities shape the practice of medicine. For Dr. Pandya, the history of medicine was not merely an academic pursuit but a way to enrich his reflections on the art and science of healing.

A frequent visitor to the museum archives, Dr Pandya saw the Archives at St John's as aligned with his vision—a space where history and medicine coalesce to inspire inquiry and understanding. His enduring contributions continue to guide and influence the study of health, ethics, and humanistic medicine, reminding us of the profound impact of interdisciplinary thinking in shaping both individual practice and collective memory. These books can be accessed only in-person, as of today, from the SL Bhatia History of Medicine Museum, Library and Archives in St John's Medical College on request.

-- **Radhika Hegde**, Curator, SL Bhatia History of Medicine Museum, Library and Archives; and **Manjulika Vaz**, Assistant Professor at the Division of Health and Humanities; St John's National Academy of Health Sciences.

I got to know Dr Sunil Pandya when I was at the Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH), doing research on health systems and financing. He was quite fascinated by my analysis of budgets and would call me to his chamber in KEM Hospital to discuss health financing-related issues; and during such discussions I learnt from him about his interest in the history of medicine.

I too was interested in the history of medicine and specifically the history of Bombay's health care system. We exchanged documents and literature on this, a good bit of archival material, including on KEM hospital. I learnt from him a lot through his personal insights.

These informal discussions and moments spent with him were indeed fascinating. I wish I had collaborated on this formally with him. But that was not to be, as both of us were busy in our own work commitments.

I also got to know him as a physician as he advised and treated my partner, Satjot, for her chronic back pain. His approach was very humane and friendly and, of course, ethical. He was the fountainhead of medical ethics and we all know his contribution to this through FMES and the IJME journal. We will miss him and remember him through these remarkable contributions he has made. Let us celebrate this.

-- **Ravi Duggal**, Independent Sociologist and Public Health Researcher, Mumbai

I first met Dr Sunil Pandya in 1975, at the age of 15, when a neurologist suspected my migraines were actually seizures due to a lesion in my brain. For many years, "SKP" would call me the "girl with the hole in her head." It did not strike me then that, by teasing, he was actually helping me shed the stigma of epilepsy.

Over the years I called upon SKP many times, as a journalist, an editor, a patient, and on behalf of family and friends. He was always accessible, he made complex ideas clear, he never talked down to me, and he spoke his mind without hesitation. And when a copyeditor chopped his interview into an incoherent paragraph, he could have given me a blasting – but simply said "Don't worry about it." SKP did not see himself as more important than the message.

Decades later when I joined *IJME* as executive editor, SKP had one bit of advice – bring the issue out on the first day of the month of publication – a practice we have tried to maintain by and large. As long as he was editor, he would read through the proofs and pick up errors that I had missed. Within a couple of days of the new issue being published, I'd receive a copy with his detailed comments. He respected editorial decisions and in my 14 years as executive editor, I do not remember a single complaint or appeal on behalf of someone. After he stepped down as editor, he was always there to give his opinion, but only when asked for it.

The memories that stay with me the most are of SKP the physician. He would take a minimum of one hour over each consultation, reading the reports, asking detailed questions, conducting a most thorough examination, and writing up meticulous notes which he would give you for your records. If you went back to him 10 years later, he would pull out his notes in a jiffy. What was even more striking was his respect and care for his patients.

Many years ago, I went to him with my father-in-law who had been advised surgery. As we left the consultation room, my father-in-law turned to SKP with tears in his eyes. Exhausted by endless tests and medical consultations over the years, he said: "You are the first doctor who examined me. You spoke *to me*, and in Hindi. You asked me what was wrong." That was the essence of SKP.

-- Sandhya Srinivasan, Independent Researcher and Consulting Editor, IJME

The sun may set on a life well-lived, but its warmth lingers in the hearts of those who remember.

Dr. Pandya was my first teacher in the history of medicine. When I had a question about the first Indian woman doctor, he quickly shared evidence from biographical sources. In our "Reviving Humanities in Medical Education" workshops, case studies from the history of medicine became an integral part of my teaching. He also showed me how American women like Ida Scudder and Elizabeth Lundy (later Kamala V Nimbkar) made significant contributions to healthcare and disability education in India at Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore, and in starting the first school of occupational therapy in Mumbai, respectively.

When my contributions to disability activism were recognised, not in India but in New York, through the Henry Viscardi Award, Dr Pandya was among the first to congratulate me. More importantly, he educated me about the award's significance and the work of Dr Viscardi, which I had been unaware of. His dedication to historical accuracy and detail was unmatched. For instance, he meticulously compiled high-resolution images of Dr Viscardi's materials and even unearthed issues of *NASEOH News* to share with me. National Society for Equal Opportunities for the Handicapped (NASEOH) was founded by two industrialists - Vijay Merchant (the famous cricketer) and FA Fazalbhoy.

I cherish a personal memory of him at Marine Drive in Mumbai, where I often retreat to enjoy the ocean when visiting the city. One morning, as I watched the waves crashing against the rocks, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. I turned to see Dr Pandya with his characteristic smile. He told me he lived nearby and enjoyed morning walks there. Like this memory, his encouragement and advice will always stay with me.

Rest in peace, Dr Pandya. You will forever remain our teacher, mentor, and guide.

--- Satendra Singh, Director-Professor of Physiology, University College of Medical Sciences, University of Delhi, and Co-Chair: International Council for Disability Inclusion in Medical Education, India

Dr. Pandya was more than just a skilled surgeon. He was a teacher, a reader, a public health advocate, an ethicist, a historian, and a writer who spoke with clarity and honesty.

I met him only twice. The first time was in 2000, at a workshop on Ethics in Medicine in Nagpur. He was the main speaker, discussing medical ethics openly, not as a moral authority but with the honesty of someone who truly believed in what he said. The second time was in 2018, at the KEM Hospital in Mumbai. His honesty struck me again—he spoke his mind and never sought approval from anyone. He often said that his honesty and humility came from his mother.

Though I met him only twice, I closely followed his work. I read his essays and editorials in the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* and the *National Medical Journal of India*. I would share these with my residents, telling them that Dr Pandya's writing was not only clear and honest but also challenged the way we think about medicine. His work, especially his "Letters from Bombay," introduced new perspectives on medical ethics and the challenges we face in our profession.

Dr Pandya's influence would often find its way into unexpected places—journal clubs, bedside discussions, and postgraduate sessions. Through his writings, my residents learned that medicine is not just about tests, surgeries, and treatments. It's about the relationship between doctor and patient, about public hospitals providing affordable care, and about practising ethics in our daily work.

I also watched his YouTube videos on the history of the Grant Medical College and KEM Hospital. Later, I learned from colleagues in Mumbai about his love for history and the meticulous research he did. His respect for his alma mater and teachers was clear. He always spoke proudly of them, knowing they had shaped his life and work. His writing reflected not just his intellect but also his deep love for the profession.

Dr Pandya lived a life marked by dedication, altruism, and purpose. He strongly believed in dying with dignity and embraced the unknown in peace. Like his colleague, Dr Manu Kothari, his views on life and death were unique. He often wrote about why we should not fear death, but rather welcome it when the time comes. As he would have wanted, we do not mourn his passing but celebrate a life that made a real difference. His values and contributions will continue to inspire doctors and teachers for years to come.

--SP Kalantri, Department of Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sewagram, 442102, Maharashtra

It was when we were launching our health humanities journal, *RHiME*, in 2014, that I first heard of Dr Sunil Pandya. When a call for submissions went out, he was amongst the first to respond in the affirmative. His paper titled "Learning in medical colleges: Then and now" was published soon after and it embodied his support for our endeavour, which was to bring about a transformation in the way medical students thought about illness. He wrote, "Students are not exposed to the humanities for 'want of time' due to massive syllabi and this in turn leads to physicians who are trained with very little or no exposure to the discussion of human suffering that accompanies disease." It is no wonder, then, that we requested him to join our editorial board, and he did so much to our delight. His support meant a lot to us, *RHiME* being, at the time, a fledgling journal trying something new and having no idea how it would be received. I was profoundly touched when, upon my premature, voluntary retirement from the University College of Medical Sciences, Delhi, he wrote something that cemented his place in my life as a mentor par excellence: "I, for one, am grateful for the brief but memorable opportunity I had of meeting you and listening to you."

Deeply reciprocated, Dr Pandya, deeply reciprocated. You will be missed.

--- Upreet Dhaliwal, Former Director-Professor of Ophthalmology, University College of Medical Sciences, University of Delhi, Delhi

On January 30, 2024, I got an email with the subject line "Salute from Mumbai". I did not recognise the sender's email ID. When I opened the email, the first sentence was, "I am Sunil Pandya, a retired neurosurgeon from Mumbai". It was early morning and that line woke me up more than the strong Chennai filter coffee in my hand. I knew Dr. Pandya well as I had read all his "Letters from Mumbai" series published in the *National Medical Journal of India*. I had met him personally just once before, during the National Bioethics Conference, but he was someone who was virtually present at all meetings of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* editors, because of the deep impact he had – and continues to have – on the journal, and on medical ethics in India.

Dr Pandya had listened to an episode of my podcast titled "Clinician Introspects" and written to me expressing his admiration for the work and his sincere appreciation. He did not know me well, and there was no need for him to make the effort to write to me. But he did. My podcast was very crude and low profile. I recorded it on my phone and posted it on a free platform. It was no match for all the impressive podcasts on medical topics out there, produced and hosted professionally. It was a time when I was starting to get discouraged by the poor response and was contemplating discontinuing it.

It was at that point that Dr. Pandya's message came, and I cannot explain the elation that I felt when I read it. Such amazing words of appreciation from a man who stood for ethics and people - centred medical practice were all that I needed to keep going. If this was the impact he had on a random amateur like me, who had interacted with him just twice, I can imagine the nourishment, succour and motivation that his students, mentees and friends would have received from him. I will forever remember his e-mail and hold him in my mind as someone who has influenced the way I do my work.

----Vijayprasad Gopichandran, Rural Women's Social Education Centre, Chengalpet 603109, INDIA, and Working Editor, IJME.