Obituary

“Dr. Kirpal Singh Chugh, Emeritus Professor of Nephrology, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), former Chairman of the Department of Medicine and Professor and Head of the Department of Nephrology, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), and former President Association Physicians of India (API) passed away on September 17, 2017 in Chandigarh. In him the medical community has lost a physician embodying the best in clinical acumen and ethics, a researcher par excellence whose contributions to the advancement of medical science and research are indelible as they are far reaching, a teacher who mentored a multitude of students to be worthy inheritors of his legacy as leading stalwarts in the field of Nephrology, and of course an exemplary human who inspired and influenced all favored by his association.

For more than half a century, he was the dominant force that established, nurtured and led the discipline of nephrology, in Asia, to the prominence it now has. In recognition of his role and achievements he earned the title: ‘Father of Nephrology in India’, a title duly endorsed by the American College of Physicians, the Royal College of Physicians and the International Society of Nephrology. In 1998, as a rare tribute, The American Journal of Kidney Diseases published an Editorial on him as a World Leader in Nephrology titled: “Five Decades of Indian Nephrology-A Personal Journey”.

Born in Patti, Punjab in 1932, he completed his undergraduate training in 1955 from Amritsar Medical College with an aspiration to specialize in renal medicine, not a recognized specialty at that time. He managed to get “genitourinary medicine” as a special subject for his postgraduate work. His MD thesis on ‘evaluation of renal biopsies’ made him its pioneer in India. In 1963, he joined the PGIMER as assistant Professor of Medicine, and with devotion and great effort he set up the Department of Nephrology in 1965, the very first dedicated to the discipline in India. In 1969, he initiated the first ‘DM in Nephrology’ in India.

During the course of his lifetime Dr. Chugh was the recipient of innumerable coveted awards. The National honors include the Padma Shree, the prestigious B.C. Roy National Award for being the “Eminent Medical Man of the Country of the Year 1992”. The Association of Physicians of India awarded him the Dr. Jivraj Mehta award and Gifted Medical Teacher Award. He also received the Master Teacher Award by the India College of Physicians (ICP), the Dhanvantri National Award and many more. In 1999 the Punjab Government honored him with the Nishan-e-Khalsa Award. His expertise found recognition in his appointment as Honorary Physician to the President of India. He was the first Asian Nephrologist to be awarded the “Distinguished International Award” by the National Kidney Foundation of USA and the “Nephrology Forum Award” by Kidney International. The International Society of Nephrology (ISN) conferred on him the prestigious Bywaters Award. The International Society of Nephrology has included him among the fifty most eminent nephrologists of the world. A film of his remarkable life and accomplishments is a part of the World Nephrology Legacy Library, alongside those of the foremost luminaries in the field of Nephrology.

Although we mourn the passing of Prof. Chugh, we also celebrate his life as a gift that enriched the quality of the lives he touched; his patients will ever remain in his debt for the compassion and healing he tendered to them, for his students he will never cease to be their guide and teacher leading them to mentor others by his example, ensuring the substance and method of his teaching lives in perpetuity. For the API family, his place will forever be integral to what it is and what it stands for. Till the very end, he was wholly committed to its aims and functioning.

Dr. Chugh is survived by his wife, Harjit, his two sons: Sumeet a cardiologist in Los Angles, Sumant a nephrologist in Chicago, and four grandchildren.

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