Dr. Noshir Wadia is widely recognised as one of the pioneers of neurology in India. He has devoted his active life to the services of neurosciences in clinical, research and teaching fields.

Born on 20th January, 1925, he completed his graduation and post-graduation at the Grant Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai in 1950. He then passed the membership examination of the Royal College of Physicians, London and received his training to be a neurologist through five years as registrar in London, under the mentorship of the internationally renowned neurologist, Lord Russell Brain.

He returned to Mumbai in 1957 to join his alma mater to set up one of the first comprehensive department of Neurology. He served as honorary professor of neurology at the Grant medical college and this is where his neurology career flourished. Dr. Wadia became known as an astute clinician, teacher and researcher. As he began his work in Mumbai, he was struck by differences in the prevalence and patterns of neurological disorders encountered in India at that time. While multiple sclerosis was most common in England, spinocerebellar ataxias, cranio vertebral anomalies and autosomal recessive conditions prevailed in India. He thus set out to investigate such diseases which formed the local problems. Over the ensuing decades, his research covered a range of neurological diseases, revealing the unique prevalence of certain diseases in India and describing some for the first time. His works on olivopontocerebellar ataxia with slow eye movements (later known as spinocerebellar Ataxia 2), Enterovirus 70 disease, neurological manifestations of congenital atlanto-axial dislocation, spinal tuberculous meningitis and Wilson’s disease are very important contributions to Indian neurology. He also participated in investigations of mine workers who developed parkinsonism resulting from Manganese toxicity. Much of his early research was before the CT or MR scanners were invented and funds, foreign exchange were short to buy even equipment primitive by today’s standards. For example, the instruments required to measure velocities of eye movements in spinocerebellar ataxias type 2 were locally created by interested engineers with help from Japanese technologists. These would appear very basic to today’s students of neurology but reflect the immense desire to analyse a vexing problem and innovative qualities of Dr. Wadia and his team. He persisted with his work on spinocerebellar ataxias and complemented his clinical observations with genotyping of SCA 2 families in early 2000. Many students owe their research techniques and acumen to the training they received while working with Dr. Wadia. He tutored nearly 100 Neurologists and physicians, several of whom have become renowned and are proud to acclaim him as their mentor. He has contributed seminal scientific papers in international journals and published a book ‘Neurological Practice: An Indian Perspective’ in 2005; which encapsulated the research publications of Indian Neurologists. In 2014, at the ripe age of 89, he undertook the exercise of entirely revising the book, along with Professor Satish Khadilkar, to include new information that had become available. To this date, this book remains the single comprehensive reference to Indian aspects of neurological practice, elucidating the nuances of clinical presentations and prevalence patterns of diseases seen in India.

During his illustrious career, Dr. Wadia held many offices and prestigious positions. He was elected President of the Neurological Society of India in 1964 and Vice President of the World Federation of Neurology in 1989. Fellowships of the Indian Academy of Medical Sciences, the Indian National Science Academy and the Indian Academy of Sciences were conferred upon him. He received honorary memberships of international organizations like the
Sociedad Neurologica, Argentina, Sociedad Chilena de Neurologica, Chile, Austrian Society of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology, Association of British Neurologists and the American Association of neurologists. He was awarded the honorary D.Sc. of the Banaras Hindu University and he was the chancellor of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology. He has been honoured by several organisations and institutions through awards, like the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar medal, Dhanwantari prize, Wockhardt Harvard award and the Rameshwardas Birla award. For his many achievements the World Federation of Neurology awarded him the first Gold Medal for ‘Service to International Neurology’ in 2009 and he was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2012.

Professor Wadia has been blessed with magnanimous personality and exemplary personal attributes. Patients who come in contact with him are fortunate as he forms a pillar of strength for them, guiding them through their difficult times. He has the fascinating quality of relating to individuals from all strata of society. Rich and poor, educated or uneducated, he is comfortable with all interactions. His basic respect for human dignity is very evident as he deals with ailing patients and their families. For his students, he is an outstanding teacher, able to impart difficult neurological paradigms in simple words and as stories; and they remain etched on their receptive minds. His ability to pitch his lectures simply for undergraduates and to thread bare complex issues with the postgraduate students is outstanding. At JJ, he ran a series of lectures which he titled ‘let symptoms speak’, that drew students from all over Mumbai and was a constant hit. His research was clinically directed, hypothesis based and aimed at helping the suffering patients. The clinical focus never left his works and efforts.

All clinicians have in them, three major professional compartments; clinical abilities, teaching skills and research attributes, residing in various proportions. Professor NH Wadia has all three attributes in ample measure. He embodies the famous quote ‘Service, Teaching and Research, in that order’, making him a complete neurologist and a pioneer in Neurology in India, particularly the western parts.

Dr. Noshir H. Wadia left for the heavenly abode on 10th April, 2016.