Obituary

(10th Sept 1933 - 28th March 2012)

Dr B.C. Mehta, former hon. Professor & head, Dr. J.C. Patel Dept of Haematology at Seth G.S. Medical College & KEM Hospital, Mumbai is no more with us. He, at the age of 79 years, left us for heavenly abode on 28th March 2012, after serving the field of haematology for over half a century.

Dr BC as popularly known amongst his professional colleagues, was born in Amreli, Gujarat on 10th September 1933. He moved to Mumbai as a child with his parents. He joined Seth G.S. Medical College in 1952 and obtained his medical qualifications from Bombay University in 1957. He then proceeded to join the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, UK and obtained MRCP in 1961. Immediately after that, he returned to India and joined department of medicine at KEM Hospital and was instrumental in setting up the first haematology services at that institute. He continued to head this speciality until his retirement in 1990. He was awarded FRCP from the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, UK in 1983 and DSc, Bombay University, Mumbai in 1992.

He was the father figure in the field of haematology for India and was pioneer in setting up “Bombay Haematology Group” now known as “Mumbai Haematology Group” as early as 1975.

Single handedly, he set up division of haematology under the department of medicine and looked after OPD, indoor patients and the laboratory for years before the department of haematology came to its existence at KEM Hospital and Seth G.S. Medical College. I had the fortune of learning my ABC of haematology under his guidance from 1976 - 81 and I have witnessed how hard he worked for developing this branch of medicine in this country. For over half a century, it was his drive, vision and leadership that pushed haematology from an unknown branch of medicine to a firmly established superspeciality.

Throughout his career, he remained a dedicated and compassionate clinician who always strove to offer the latest and best available treatment to his patients. However, Dr BC was best known to a generation of haematologists and scientists, countrywide, for his incisive, truthful, hard hitting but respectful comments at scientific meetings and his research in the field of nutritional anaemia especially iron deficiency anaemia. He was an author of over 200 papers and I had the fortune of being a co-author with him for over 40 of them. He also wrote editorials and review articles by invitation in various prestigious international and national journals. He contributed over 25 chapters in various books in the field of haematology. He always encouraged teaching and research.

His life was significantly influenced by his teacher, late Dr. J.C. Patel after whom he got his department of haematology at KEM Hospital named. He was also responsible for forming Dr. J.C. Patel medical research department at Brahmakumari SES MG Hospital, Mumbai of which he remained director until his demise.

In addition to KEM Hospital and Seth G.S. Medical College, Mumbai, he was also consultant haematologist at B.J. Wadia Hospital for Children, Mumbai, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre (1971-83) as well as Nanavati Hospital and Research Centre (1980-2003).

He had outstanding achievements from student days. He also won many laurels and awards from many prestigious medical forums. To mention a few, he received Dr. T.M. Shah scholarship, Bombay University from 1952-57, Dr. P.T. Patel entrance scholarship in 1952, Lalji Naranji scholarship in 1954, Unichem haematology lectureship by Associations of Physicians of India in 1971 and a large number of orations, just to name a few - Vithalbhai Patel oration, Manorama Sapre oration, J.B. Chatterjee oration, George Coelho oration, J.G. Parekh oration, M.R. Rao oration, Dr. Y. Subba Rao oration and Netaji oration.

He was chairman, president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer of several Indian scientific societies. He was editor of Indian Journal of Medical Sciences (2003-2012), Indian Journal of Haematology (1986-1990) and Journal of Indian society for clinical pharmacology and therapeutics (1985-1986).

His professional knowledge and oratory skills kept the audience spellbound. His enviable knowledge and popularity crowned with honesty endeared him to the medical fraternity. He traveled widely sparing no city in India spreading the knowledge of haematology. He was an astute organizer and was the brain behind inviting “6th Conference of International Society of Haematology, Asia-Pacific division” to Mumbai in 1987.

Outside medicine, he was a devoted family man and committed follower of “Brahmakumari Movement” to which he devoted a large part of his life towards the end. His breadth and depth of knowledge on various aspects of life, beyond haematology, combined with an engaging personality ensured that he always remained as a respected leader to be followed by all.

Dr BC is no more with us. By his demise, the haematology society of India in general and Mumbai in particular has lost a distinguished guide and philosopher at a time when his services were most needed. His demise has left a vacuum which is impossible to fill. He is survived by his wife, 3 children and grandchildren. His students are scattered all over the world. He will remain alive in memories and actions of his students and their students!

Dr M.B. Agarwal
Consultant Haematologist, Bombay Hospital, Mumbai