Obituary

Prof. Surinder Kaur (07. 03.1933 - 12.10.2004)

On 12th October 2004, after a long battle with a brain tumor, Prof. Surinder Kaur succumbed to the disease she had fought patiently and courageously. For all those who knew her, she was a luminary, a charismatic leader, and one of the first few who were instrumental in bringing dermatology out of the shadows to its rightful place in the sun. If someone were to pick amongst the women dermatologists in India, her place would definitely be on the top.

She was born on 7th March 1933 and grew up in an intellectual environment - her father, Dr. G. S. Talib, was a great scholar and is believed to be the first to translate the Guru Granth Sahib into English. After she was awarded an MD (Internal Medicine) by Punjabi University in 1964, she started working as a registrar. In 1967, she obtained another postgraduate degree with dermatology as an additional subject. She soon realized that skin diseases were not only common but also very different and merited a specialty of their own. She had the distinction of starting the Department of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology at PGIMER, Chandigarh and bringing it to national eminence. She worked as the lone faculty member until 1975 and went on to become the Professor and Head of the Department in 1985, a position she took to great heights until her retirement in 1993 after putting in 28 years of dedicated service to the institute.

She enriched her knowledge and experience when she received the commonwealth fellowship and went to England in the year 1978. Her areas of interest were general dermatology and leprosy. Prof. Kaur’s best academic contributions were in the field of systemic involvement in leprosy, and her knowledge of internal medicine proved to be an asset. She published many papers in international and national journals. She was honored by the Kanishka Award and Hari Om Ashram Award of the Medical Council of India in recognition of her significant contribution to the specialty but she was always modest and self effacing about her accomplishments.

An academician to the core, she was a rigorous taskmaster with the capability of scrutinizing the most minor patient details with ease. She was both adored and loved by her junior colleagues and students alike for being a brilliant clinical dermatologist and a warm-hearted and compassionate physician.

Nobody could know Prof. Surinder Kaur well without being aware of a certain grace and fineness in her personality. I will never forget the day during the 1989 National IADVL Conference in Mumbai when she took some time off to take us to a studio where Amitabh Bachchan and Amrish Puri were shooting for a movie and despite their busy schedule both the actors spent an hour talking to her. In my opinion her leadership is measured not so much by the number of people she led but by the numbers of leaders she created. Several of her juniors and students occupy and head departments of international repute, both within and outside the country.

She saw patients and even pursued her latest scientific project after her surgery and chemotherapy, and carried the burden of a painful disease with stoic endurance. The dermatological community has lost a great persona who in our minds, in our memories and in our hearts will be with us forever. Her attitude and sayings will survive her in the practice of those who learned from her and those who they in turn have taught.

A. J. Kanwar