Obituary

Professor Yoshio Suzuki
(1947-2008)

“It has seemed to me for a long time that the influence of a loved one’s death on those he has left behind ought to be none other than one of greater responsibility. Does the one who is passing away not leave a hundredfold of everything he had begun to be continued by those who survive them ---if they had shared any kind of inner bond at all?...”

There is no one to whom this statement would apply more than Professor Yoshio Suzuki, the Head of the Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya Daini Red Cross Hospital, Nagoya, Japan and a great lover of India. After being virtually handpicked by the great Professor Kenichiro Sugita, the Chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya University School of Medicine, Japan for his outstanding character and surgical skills, Professor Suzuki dedicated his life to carrying his mentor Professor Sugita’s legacy forward with great responsibility and utmost humility.

Professor Yoshio Suzuki was born on July 10, 1947. He completed his premedical education (1965-67), his MD (1967-73) from the Nagoya University, and his residency training in Neurosurgery from Nagoya university and Shizuoka Saiseikai Hospital (1974-78) leading to his Japanese Board Certification in Neurosurgery in 1978. He was also a Research Fellow in Pharmacology, Mie University, Japan (1978-81) and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Pharmacology, University of Calgary, Canada (1981-83). The latter position was responsible for his gaining excellent command over English and his lifelong research interests. He continued his research work in vascular neurosurgery leading to his PhD from the Nagoya University in 1981. He was appointed Assistant Professor, Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya University School of Medicine (1983-96) and continued as Lecturer (1996-7), and as Associate Professor (1997-9). From 1999 until his untimely demise, he was the Head, Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya Daini Red Cross Hospital, Nagoya, Japan, which is one of the largest affiliated hospitals of the Nagoya University School of Medicine. His avid research interests included investigating the role of various therapeutic modalities for the management of vasospasm following aneurysmal subarachnoid hemorrhage; the role of nitric oxide on vascular endothelium; and, the pathogenesis and surgical approaches for Moya Moya disease. He had also proposed a new classification for the surgical management of tentorial meningiomas.

Dr Suzuki learnt his skill and technique of cerebrovascular neurosurgery from Professor Sugita and perhaps far surpassed his mentor in his technical ability. All those who have seen him operate would vouch for the fact that he would complete a superficial temporal-middle cerebral artery anastomosis for Moya Moya disease in barely 12-15 min. We have personally assisted him in a surgery for complex basilar apex aneurysm where he first gave anesthesia, placed all the invasive monitoring lines, did the craniotomy and clipped the aneurysm and finally reversed the patient all by himself while working in a relatively small affiliated hospital close to Nagoya. At Lucknow, after traveling for nearly 11 h on an international flight all through the night, he stepped directly into the operating room and successfully clipped a giant carotico-ophthalmic aneurysm. The way he conducted himself in the operating room was also exemplary. There was not a wasted movement, never a raised voice and always a jovial disposition, no matter how difficult the case or the situation during surgery. This special ability endeared him to all the junior staff members, nursing and paramedical staff and fellows working with him. After each surgery, like his mentor, he would meticulously draw sketches and write operative steps of every procedure that he did. His outstanding surgical skills placed him in great demand in many Asian countries including Japan, China, Korea, Indonesia and Singapore and he was constantly traveling to these countries to perform surgery. He had a special love for India after his initial stay for three months in Lucknow where he helped to establish the Department of Neurosurgery at the Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences and he followed this up with several visits during his lifetime. He was a Sarveshwari Memorial Orator and Visiting Professor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, Sri Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram, Postgraduate Institute, Chandigarh, Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow and Hinduja...
Hospital, Mumbai. His unfailing presence at nearly every cerebrovascular meeting in India spoke volumes about his special love and respect for Indian neurosurgeons and for cerebrovascular neurosurgery in India.

Professor Sunil Patel, the present chairman of the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, USA once commented “One does not know the correct definition of hospitality until one visits the Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya University School of Medicine, Japan.” Professor Yoshio Suzuki along with his colleagues at the Department of Neurosurgery, Nagoya University, played a stellar role in making numerous visitors from all over the world feel so much at home at Nagoya. Professor Suzuki was the technical advisor for Mizuho Company, Japan that supported the Sugita International Fellowship for young neurosurgeons. Many of the Sugita fellows, now senior Neurosurgeons and Chairmen of Departments all over the world, would fondly recall the great lengths to which Professor Suzuki would go to make them feel comfortable in Japan. Nearly all Indian neurosurgeons who visited Nagoya during the time that Dr Suzuki was there have experienced his generous hospitality at various restaurants, especially the Indian ones, in and around Nagoya. While being the Head of the Department at Nagoya Daini Red Cross Hospital, he had also set up a fund by his own personal efforts to give young neurosurgeons from developing countries an exposure to the advanced surgical skills in Japan. The foreign visitors to the Nagoya University will immediately identify with the Japanese song

“Oshie no niwa nimo Hayaiku tose…”

(How fast the days, how swift the days, how quickly they flew)

“Omoeba itotoshi Kono toshi tsuki
Ima koso wakareme Iza saraba…”

(How I’ll miss the days I spent here, how I’ll miss the life here…)


Perhaps Professor Suzuki’s greatest contribution to neurosurgery has been his mentorship. A number of young neurosurgeons at Nagoya University, at various affiliated hospitals, and at Nagoya Daini Red Cross Hospital have been personally assisted in their difficult cases by Professor Suzuki. He would assist the young residents in operating on even his private patients and would do it so well and so effortlessly that the young neurosurgeon would feel that it was he and not Professor Suzuki who was performing the actual surgery. He would travel to various parts of Japan, Indonesia, Korea and India at his own expense to help out with surgery...and there was always encouragement and never a word of reproach or impatience. He was forever encouraging young neurosurgeons to take up newer areas in neurosurgery like endovascular neurosurgery and skull base surgery. After surgery, without fail and without any formal invitation, the entire team would troop to the nearest pub or restaurant for beer and dinner! Twice every week, Professor Suzuki would join many young colleagues for a vigorous round of tennis. This habit was responsible for his being in peak fitness before he developed his unfortunate illness.

Professor Yoshio Suzuki has two sons and a daughter. His wife, Mrs Michiko Suzuki, is also as humble and hospitable as her husband. She was always in the background helping Professor Suzuki and providing strength to him to carry out his exemplary work.

Professor Yoshio Suzuki came to the Indian Society for Cerebrovascular Neurosurgery meeting in Thiruvananthapuram. Immediately after his departure from India, as was characteristic of him, he was already planning his next visit to India when he developed renal cell cancer with brain metastasis and had to undergo surgery, radiotherapy and immunotherapy. While he was ailing and could not even get up from bed, unfortunately Mrs. Suzuki also developed breast cancer with metastasis. Despite this, when we phoned him from India, he laughed and said, “I am sorry I cannot come to India right now but I will very soon. Do not worry about me. Buddha is looking after me…!” Such was his indomitable spirit.

Professor Suzuki was a goodwill ambassador who was instrumental in forging great friendships between Japanese and Indian neurosurgeons. By setting very high professional and personal standards for himself that he followed to his last day; and by reaching out to so many people from far-off lands, touching them with his generosity and humility, he has gently and irrevocably changed their lives for the better. The best way to pay homage to him and his silent work is through these lines “…But with each individual who is taken from us, the tasks around us have only increased. The heaviness of this unexplained and possibly mightiest occurrence, presses us more deeply into life and demands the most extreme duties of our gradually increasing strength.”


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