We have miles to go

Sir,
The Journal of Indian Association of Pediatric Surgeons (JIAPS) in its new Avatar has reached the desk of our members by now. How do you like it? The reaction is bound to be different from member to member. For me, it is nostalgia that took the better part of my feelings. Like any living subject or any growing object, changes are inevitable in course of time. Likewise, the Journal that is living and growing should show signs of change with time and it has been just that.

Journal of any academic or professional body is a mirror or show-window for that organization. It had been a grand event for our Association to have its own Journal and it took more than twenty-five years for the Journal to see the light of the day. We, the Calcutta Group, under the able leadership of Dr. Subir K. Chatterjee was indeed proud to be entrusted with the venture. We had to go through many trials and tribulations and we took them in our stride with dedication. Our friends and colleagues in IAPS were all helpful and co-operative. A corpus was built in time. But to meet the running expenses was a perpetual worry, as one could not nibble away the corpus to cover it. Advertisements were measly and it was not difficult to understand why, since the venture was new. The logistics needed for any such publications require a highly professional acumen. We braved it. We were hamstrung by the paucity of good articles whose flow was, at best, inadequate. We kept inviting indigenous and overseas contributors. We gradually could overcome the ‘teething troubles’. With the goodwill of the IAPS members, the Editorial Board was able to publish the Journal regularly.

Now the change. To echo the sentiment of the Editor-in-Chief, the ‘old bottle’ has now been changed for a ‘new’ one. But do keep the ‘old wine’. As the famous Australian Pediatric surgeon Durham Smith wrote in a different context, “The bathwater needs changing, but don’t throw the baby out.”

At one time the idea was mooted to merge the JIAPS with Journals published from the West, as already has been the practice with some conglomerates of Associations. But this would have severely compromised the ‘Indianness’ of the Journal. Dr. Chatterjee was against it and we stood as one man with him. The idea was dropped eventually. And that turned out to be an almost prophetic decision. The entire scenario of Indian panorama has changed in last few years and we are in the throes of being a global major. A wave of change everywhere including health and medicare is knocking at the door. We have a population over 1.02 billion of which over 40% are in the pediatric age group. This is in sharp contrast with the geriatric-centric population of the West and is thought to be a source of strength and not hindrance for the country. The demographic and ethnic variations, the disease-patterns in this land is still a big challenge for us but a source of envy to others in terms of wealth of clinical and research materials.

So far, the growth and development of Pediatric surgery in this country has remained limited to some major Teaching hospitals and super-speciality Centres. The resultant growth, though praiseworthy, has been mostly vertical. But where is the horizontal expansion of the services provided? The paucity of facilities force the patients to suffer. Not all the patients need tertiary-level care. Spread of facilities are to district or taluk level is urgently needed. Scope of Day-care surgery needs further exploration. Pediatric surgery has so far, remained basically urban-centric and not without reasons. But a change in the mindset is now needed. Young Pediatric surgeons (and surgeons with exposure to Pediatric surgery) need to be motivated for this. Due to explosive growth of Information Technology he should never feel marginalized. We do not have to moan “Is Pediatric Surgery a Living or Dying Speciality?”

How JIAPS fits in the deliberations outlined above? As, flagship Journal of the IAPS it should spare no effort to attain and maintain an international standard. At the same time, it has to maintain its ‘Indianness’ by keeping an eye on the progress of the speciality in the country. It can play a great role in the act of motivation outlined above. The Editor-in-Chief Devendra Gupta plans to publish the Journal “with review articles, original articles, grand round cases, clinical/radiological images, a few case reports, abstracts, letters to the Editor, and information on forthcoming events.” Why not add some simple articles with enough tips for practical management on common disorders – by experienced teachers for benefit of young surgeons, to add to their confidence, and also invite feed backs. This can be published as a handbook later. The addition of a ‘Refresher’s page’ will be helpful.

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