



History

Professor T. Gopinathan

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ABSTRACT

Thekkepat Gopinathan was the former Director and Professor and Head of the department of dermatology and venereology, Government Medical College, Calicut. Due to his hard work and dedication, the department of dermatology of Calicut Medical College grew step by step and became a postgraduate training center in the year 1972. He was the recipient of many awards that included Dr. Ambady Oration Award (1980), American Academy Award (1983), Indian Medical Association (IMA) AMS Award (1982), Fellow Madras Medical College Award (1985), Best Doctor Award, Calicut IMA (1997), and Prof. K. C. Kandhari Foundation Award (2001). He was the National President of Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists and had been the Honorary Secretary and President of Calicut, IMA. Professor T. Gopinathan was one of the main persons who took initiative in implementing the idea of starting an online journal as he felt that there was a need for better “group-specific communication” among the growing number of young practicing dermatologists in India. This idea later materialized as the Indian Dermatology Online Journal. The legend that he is, he will be remembered and revered by all who ever interacted with him.

Keywords: Professor T. Gopinathan, Calicut Medical College, Department of dermatology and venereology, Indian Dermatology Online Journal

INTRODUCTION

A good teacher explains, but a great teacher inspires.....

Dr. Thekkepat Gopinathan was one such legend [Figure 1]. An illustrious career as a teacher of dermatology spanning over six decades was an inspiration to thousands of dermatologists who include veterans as well as millennials. His journey started when dermatology was considered as a “tail end” of specialties and he was a part of the huge transformation that happened in the field.^[1]

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Dr. Thekkepat Gopinathan was born on March 21, 1931, at Trissur.^[2] He completed schooling from Trissur and graduation from Madras University. Dr. Gopinathan did his MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) from Madras Medical College and Diploma in Venereology from Institute of Venereology, Madras. He had his training under Dr. R. V. Rajam. In 1958, he joined Trivandrum Medical College and under the guidance of Dr. Ambadi Bhaskara Menon, he worked as a clinical tutor in the department of dermatology.^[3] Later, he was selected for a 3-year residency training in dermatology in United States of America at the University of Pennsylvania. There under the guidance of Dr. Eugene J. Van Scott, he worked on “Physiology of skin with reference to

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Figure 1: Dr. Thekkepat Gopinathan (1931–2016).

Vitiligo.” He was awarded MS (Master of Science) in 1961.^[2] His scientific paper, “A study of the lesion of vitiligo” published in Archives of Dermatology in 1965 is considered a pioneering work on vitiligo.^[4] At the University of Pennsylvania, he was guided by renowned masters such as Dr. Hermann Beerman (co-author of Modern Clinical Syphilology), Dr. D. M. Pillsbury, Dr. A. M. Kligman, and Dr. W. B. Shelly.^[2]

CAREER AND ACHIEVEMENTS

He came back to India and joined Calicut Medical College in 1961, thus forming the first dermatology department in Kerala. Later he joined for MD (Doctor of Medicine) dermatology under Dr. Kandhari at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. He re-joined Calicut Medical College after his MD. Due to his hard work and dedication, department of dermatology and venereology grew step by step and became a postgraduate training center in the year 1972.^[2]

Department of dermatology and venereology of Calicut Medical College had tremendous growth under his leadership. Phototherapy, electrosurgery, electrolysis, and minor surgical procedures were done routinely. Postgraduate students were sent to Institute of Venereology, Madras and Leprosy Institute, Karigiri for special training. As far as patient care was concerned, there was no compromise.

He was a teacher par excellence. Like all great teachers he told his students where to look, never told them what to see. He was a well disciplined and punctual human being. He imparted these qualities to his students as well. Academic research was given priority in the department and many innovative papers were published under his mentorship. When he was the head, the department was visited by Dr. R. N. Thin, the world renowned venereologist. He was very

much impressed by the “STD (sexually transmitted diseases) card” system of record keeping at Calicut Medical College. That same system is still followed in the department.

His capabilities as an organizer were well demonstrated during various meetings organized by him on behalf of the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists, and Leprologists (IADVL) and the Indian Medical Association (IMA). He held various posts during his career. He was appointed as “Honorary Advisor and Convener in STD to Government of Kerala and Secretary of Health.” During this period, skin and venereal disease clinics were opened in all district hospitals. He is the only dermatologist to hold the position of Director and Professor at Calicut Medical College. He was the Founder-President of the Kerala Branch of IADVL in 1982 and held the posts of National Secretary and President of IADVL. He was the founder of the Malabar Dermatology Club, an association of dermatologists of North Kerala. He also served as the Honorary Secretary and the President of IMA Calicut.^[2]

AWARDS AND HONORS

Considering his meritorious services and contributions to the field of dermatology, he was bestowed various awards and recognitions. Dr. Ambadi Oration Award (1980), Founder Fellow of IMA Academy of Medical Specialties (1982), Non-Resident Fellow – American Academy of Dermatology (1983), Fellow of Madras Medical College (1985), Best Doctor Award, Calicut IMA (1997), Prof. K. C. Kandhari Foundation Award by National IADVL (2001), and Prof. Sehgal Award for Excellence in Dermatology (2009) to name a few.^[2]

But what made him stand out among the crowd was his passion for the subject and the never ending thirst for knowledge. Even after retirement, he was an active presence in almost all the academic meetings and conferences till his health permitted. Even after that, he found a way to interact with the new generation of budding dermatologists through online discussion groups. Professor T. Gopinathan was one of the main persons who took the initiative in implementing the idea of starting an online journal as he felt that there was a need for better “group-specific communication” among the growing number of young practicing dermatologists in India. This idea later materialized as the Indian Dermatology Online Journal.^[1,5] His passion transcended generations and inspired dermatologists of all age groups.^[2]

CONCLUSION

Professor T. Gopinathan is no longer with us today. He passed away on April 13, 2016.^[2] He is survived by his wife

(Mrs. Rema), two sons, and one daughter. His legacy survives through his students and colleagues in various parts of the globe.....

“Better than a thousand days of diligent study, is one day with a great teacher.” Me along with all who were inspired by him will consider ourselves blessed to have had that privilege in our lives.

He was a great teacher who planted the seeds of greatness in the minds of the future generations...

Declaration of patient consent

Not required as there are no patients in this article.

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Conflicts of interest

Dr. K. Pavithran is on the editorial board of the Journal.

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