

Jamnadas C. Patel (1908–2003)

J. C. Patel (JCP) passed away on 11 May 2003 in Mumbai. At the time of his death – 95 years old – he was still active as the Editor of the *Indian Journal of Medical Sciences*. Even the May issue of the journal was edited by him. His final wish was that no condolence meetings be held for him. He was averse to posthumous pseudoglorification and inanities mouthed generally at condolence meetings. Hence, in this obituary I highlight only those aspects of work which he had cherished and truly nurtured during his lifetime.

Patel was born on 2 August 1908 in Karamsad town of Kheda District Gujarat, in a poor family. Eldest of three siblings, at four years of age, he lost his mother, a great devotee of Swami Narayana. His father who served the Vadodara state was posted in different towns. Hence the young children were entrusted to relatives, neighbours and friends. Young JCP learnt, very early in life, the lessons of self-reliance, hard work and persistence. As there was no one to look after the household, he was married early at the age of 14 years. He used to relish working on the family farm and gained a lifelong robustness by looking after the farm animals. His premedical college education was at Vadodara, where he developed some lifelong friendships. Before he joined Grant Medical College at Mumbai, he had also contemplated on his choice to be an engineer or a forest officer. High marks at the Intermediate Science level exams had opened up all these options for him. His choice of medicine augured well for modern medicine in India, at a critical juncture in pre-independent India.

JCP was influenced, early in his life, by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the freedom struggle. The smug British professors at the Grant Medical College often made fun of his wearing khadi and a Gandhi cap. But JCP was made up of stern steel and could not care less. He believed in simple living. As he had to eat in cheap and unhygienic places during his student days, he suffered often from water-borne infections. He had several attacks of malaria and also developed tropical sprue. His lifelong interest in tropical diseases and haematology emerged from personal suffering. He had to struggle, despite his bright academic career, to get financial assistance from charitable trusts. During his postgraduate studies in general medicine, he used to assist B. B. Yodh, his teacher, by doing laboratory work in the latter's clinic.

JCP was an ambitious young physician. He obtained his B Sc degree in physiology, so that he could obtain a fellowship for Ph D in physiology at University College, London. He was India's first internist with a Ph D degree in the basic medical sciences. He passed MRCP (London) in the year 1936. On his return from England, JCP had a one-year assignment at J.J. Hospital and at St. George Hospital, both in Mumbai. He was a great patriot, and when he got an opportunity to work at the Indians-initiated King Edward VII Memorial (KEM) Hospital in Mumbai he found his home base.

From 1941 to 1967, for 26 years, JCP pioneered several specialities and clinical researches at KEM hospital. As early



as 1955, he started a speciality of diabetology, that later flowered into a postgraduate centre of excellence in endocrinology and metabolism due to efforts of M. K. Dhirwani, S. D. Bhandarkar and Padma Menon. His emphasis on diet control in diabetes mellitus, as early as in the 50s, has now become a mainstay in the therapy of the disease. He truly exemplified that a well-balanced, low caloric diet can lead to an active and long lifespan. He was on the expert committees on diabetes of several national and international organizations.

JCP's work on tetanus prophylaxis was path-breaking. His use of robust designs of clinical trials and epidemiological methods impressed many of his students, including U. K. Sheth, Kisan Modi, Neelima Kshirsagar and myself. Tetanus immunology and critical care of patients received much attention after JCP's pioneering work. His endeavour to get tetanus

prophylaxis incorporated in the public health care led to a significant saving of human lives in India.

JCP also pioneered haematology and clinical drug trials with new drugs at Seth G.S. Medical College, Mumbai. He headed the Haematology Unit of ICMR, that later metamorphosed into the National Institute of Immunohaematology and Dr J.C. Patel Postgraduate Department of Haematology. Many scientific contributions have emerged from these centres. JCP's student B. C. Mehta, in an evangelical fervour, championed the cause of the most neglected major problem in India – iron deficiency.

JCP also pioneered another field in India. He was one of the first brilliant physicians to be a Medical Advisor to Glaxo Laboratories. He was the founder President of the Association of Medical Advisors to the Pharmaceutical Industry. This association pioneered pharmaceutical medicine in India. He had also served as a Medical Officer with Burmah Shell, and later Hindustan Petroleum, until April 2003. JCP was also associated as a consultant with Bombay Hospital from 1950 to 1998, with Singhanian Hospital and S.L. Raheja Hospital for diabetes (1984–2003).

JCP's scientific contributions led to his occupying important positions such as Member of the scientific governing bodies of CDRI, ITRI, ICMR, and President of the Research Society of Seth G.S. Medical College. He was founder fellow of the National Academy of Medical Sciences and of the All India Institute of Diabetes, Indian College of Physicians, Indian College of Nutrition and Indian College of Geriatrics. He was office-bearer and president of many major professional societies like Indian Society of Haematology, Diabetes Association of India, Association of Physicians of India, Indian Medical Association, Indian Society of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics. He was a trustee for several important trusts. His commitment to rural and community health was substantial.

Personally, I cherish my association of more than forty years with him, initially as a student and later as a colleague. JCP was a doyen of medical sciences in India.

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