

Prof. Dr. R.G. Valia (17-05-1931 – 15-06-2022)



The news of the demise of this doyen of dermatology in India has saddened the heart of the dermatology community in India. We have indeed lost in him a great mind who always thought of the betterment of education and patient care in dermatology. Although most of us know him through his work of editing the first three editions of the IADVL Textbook of Dermatology, his contributions to the dermatology community in India are manifold.

Born in Lathi, a town in Saurashtra, Gujarat in 1931, the fourth of eight siblings, his family migrated to Mumbai when he was aged 11. Passing MBBS from Seth GS Medical College and KEM Hospital, Mumbai in 1957, he worked in the medicine department of LTM Medical College and General Hospital, Mumbai and submitted his thesis for MD (Medicine). However, given the passing rate of 15% at the time and his straightened financial circumstances, he was counselled to register for the DVD course, advice that he heeded. He passed his DVD from Grant Medical College and JJ Hospital, Mumbai, in 1965.

In 1971, he joined the Dermatology Department in LTM Medical College as an Honorary Assistant Professor. Since Mumbai University did not offer a MD course in Dermatology and Venereology, he passed FCPS, which was MCI recognized as an equivalent, in 1973. His students greatly benefited from

his expertise in relatively less studied subjects like contact dermatitis, eczema and contact leukoderma. He took special interest in educating students about acquiring soft skills like history taking and counselling. In the eighties, he started a contact dermatitis OPD and even a dermatoplastic OPD, which was before the advent of dermatosurgery.

During this stint he and Dr Leslie Marquis conceived the idea of an Indian authored postgraduate dermatology textbook since the only available textbooks emphasized and portrayed skin disorders in Caucasian skin. Sadly, Dr Marquis passed away suddenly before any chapter had been received, but with the backing of Dr. K. Siddappa, the then IADVL President and later the Director of the Textbook Project, he completed this dream project in 1994 as its Editor in Chief. The IADVL textbook soon became popular due to its error free printing, emphasis on skin disorders prevalent in Indian skin, evocative clinical photographs from some of the best photographers in the speciality nationally, and representative nature. Its editors were stalwarts from all the dermatology departments in Mumbai and from across the country. To collaborate with so many colleagues for this honorary effort, request them, motivate them and persist with them to submit their chapters on time in an era that lacked computers, mobiles and even basic emails was a Herculean effort! He oversaw its first three editions with the support of his dermatologist son Dr Ameet Valia.

He became the Honorary Professor and Head of the department at LTM Medical College and finally retired as Professor Emeritus in 1991, only to start another Dermatology Department at the upcoming KJ Somaiya Medical College and Research Centre in Mumbai the next year, where he served as the Honorary Professor and Head. The Covid pandemic compelled him to retire from his private practice at the age of 89.

From 1994 onwards until his last days he continued to edit a highly popular newsletter 'What's New in Dermatology?' Age could not temper his intense curiosity to learn new ideas and knowledge which was also evident in our monthly

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academic forum meetings where he invariably read up the subject at hand and shared his notes from the recent literature.

Beyond academics, Dr. RG Valia was a very social, outgoing person inviting his colleagues and students at college for regular canteen visits and enjoying a lighter moment. His home or clinic was the regular meeting place for the seniors for any IADVL or academic business meetings. He loved to host, share and collaborate. He frequently lamented the lack of record keeping in our OPDs and stressed the need to pool data across cities and states to bring out the real epidemiology of skin diseases. During formal or informal meetings, he enlivened the atmosphere by his subtle humour and numerous anecdotes.

He officiated as the President of the IADVL in the year 1994 and as the President of IADVL (Maharashtra branch) in the year 1981. He delivered the Dr. BM Ambady Oration and Dr Leslie Marquis Oration and was conferred the prestigious Prof. KC Kandhari Lifetime Achievement Award by the IADVL. He also worked as the Dermatology Sectional Editor

of the API Textbook of Medicine and was a former trustee of the Bombay Leprosy Project.

For all his bonhomie and food-loving nature, Dr. RG Valia insisted on attending annual conferences of the IADVL at his own expense. He tried to inculcate those values in his students through his talk titled 'Ten Commandments for a budding dermatologist'. His article on 'Curable Eczemas' is a lesson about how to practice "Sherlockian" dermatology and give permanent relief to the patient. We will sorely miss his comforting smile and keen sense of observation.

He is survived by his wife Dr. Sudha Valia and son Dr. Ameet Valia.

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