

Obituary

[The preceding article was written by Dr Sarada Menon in September 2021 in response to our request before her death on 5 December 2021. We requested her colleague, Dr R. Thara, Co-Founder and Vice-Chairman, SCARF, to write an obituary—*Editors*]

M. Sarada Menon

(5 April 1923–5 December 2021)



Dr Sarada Menon, MD, FRCPsych (UK) was the first woman psychiatrist in India and the founder of the non-governmental organization Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF)

After obtaining her Diploma in Psychiatric Medicine from NIMHANS, Bangalore in 1961, she became the superintendent of the state-run Madras Mental Hospital (now known as Institute of Mental

Health). This heralded an era of reforms with a focus on psychosocial rehabilitation. The hospital which only served as a custodial place was slowly turned into a mental health centre through many far-reaching reforms initiated by her. She saw with great foresight that interactions among social workers, the patient's family and the patient were the key to the patient's recovery. Therefore, she took the step of appointing for the first time professional social workers, started outpatient services, initiated an industrial therapy/vocational centre where patients could be engaged.

Since she had her MD in General Medicine before she became a psychiatrist, she was quick to recognize the need to look at the physical health issues of persons with mental disorders. She was a firm believer in liaison psychiatry and would urge all young doctors to make a physical examination on their patients.

She also believed in careful and complete documentation of all findings and was very particular about well-written case histories, which facilitated reviews and follow-up.

Dr Menon was also responsible for starting postgraduate courses in psychiatry. She convinced the government to establish psychiatric clinics in all the district headquarter hospitals in Tamil Nadu.

In 1984, she founded SCARF along with Dr Rajkumar and Dr Thara with the objectives of rehabilitation, research and promoting awareness on mental health. Today, SCARF is a highly reputed centre nationally and internationally in many facets of work on mental health.

Right from her early years, she displayed a great penchant for teaching and even now her students many of whom have distinguished themselves in their own right recall with great appreciation her clinical acumen and clarity and enthusiasm in teaching. She inspired several bright young people to take up the discipline of psychiatry. She naturally served as examiner in almost all universities in the country and also guided several PhD scholars.

Her desire to serve the community propelled her to work for the Red Cross, and she guided many other charitable organizations such as the TTK hospital, the family organization ASHA and Anbagam.

Dr Menon's contribution to psychiatric rehabilitation won her wide acclaim all over the world. She was the regional vice-president and also the secretary general of the World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation (WAPR). She was the founder of the Indian Chapter of WAPR.

Many awards came her way, the most notable being the Padma Bhushan in 1993, one of the highest civilian awards given by the Government of India

She was indeed a highly modest, humble, cheerful and compassionate person. Almost all who had crossed her path were struck by her ability to connect not just with them, but with their issues in life and their families. She was a universal mother.

We were indeed fortunate to have her among our midst for almost a century and became better human beings ourselves by imbibing many of her sterling qualities. It is for us to take forward her vision of making the world a better place for those persons with mental disorders and their families.

R. THARA
