

Obituaries

Mohit Singla

(6 October 1980–14 August 2020)



Writing this piece for my dear friend and colleague, Dr Mohit brings back many poignant memories. Mohit was simple in his demeanour, a genius of his own kind, a lover of children, whose quest for knowledge was not bound by any defined system of examinations. He spent close to one and a half decades working in various research positions in different projects in the Department of Paediatrics at the All India

Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi.

He was born on 6 October 1980 in Chandigarh. He joined DAV College, Chandigarh after matriculation and thereafter, he joined the MBBS batch of 1998 at AIIMS, New Delhi. He was the first-rank holder of the AIIMS entrance examination that year.

My association with him dates back to 2006 when I joined as a senior research fellow in one of the research projects in the Paediatric Gastroenterology Division of AIIMS, New Delhi. The memories of my first meeting with him in the Oral Rehydration Unit (ORU), C-5 ward of the main hospital, AIIMS are still vivid when I saw him running around to monitor children admitted with acute diarrhoea.

His sensitivity and compassion for children was visible in his body language and one could feel the warmth with which he communicated with their parents. In a short time, we developed a fantastic camaraderie with each other. He used to take me along to the paediatric casualty and assiduously explain to me about common paediatric illnesses. Whenever there was a rush it was very common to see the Casualty Medical Officer in the paediatric casualty calling him for help. Working in the paediatric casualty with all his zeal used to invariably make him lose his sense of time, hunger and sleep. One could easily spot him attending to sick children even in the wee hours of the morning, even when he was not on the duty roster for that day. The nursing and support staff of the paediatric casualty had a special fondness for him as he used to assist them rather than ask for their help. I distinctly remember at that time children with difficult intravenous cannulation were being sent to the ORU from paediatric oncology wards and most of us used to give up after having tried our level best. But I never saw him giving up. He used to lovingly take children in his arms and never bothered about the fact that they would vomit or pass urine/stools. With

his intelligent humour and a light-hearted detour in his conversation with their parents, he could easily change the grim mood of the moment for everyone around without losing his touch of empathy. It was heart-warming to witness his effect in the eyes of the parents who had brought their sick child to the ward. Not just once but on many occasions, I had seen parents thanking him with their blessings on his head for all the help he provided, and the personal pains he took for their child. While we always waited for a hospital attendant to take the blood and stool samples of children admitted to ORU to various laboratories, he used to take these samples himself and deposit them at the laboratories. He never waited for the reports to be delivered back to ORU. He used to go and collect the reports himself.

Mohit enjoyed the cut and thrust of academic discussions with his in-depth knowledge and convincing opinions on varied subjects. He had a proclivity for physics, and working with various equipment used to come naturally to him. His passion, intelligence and indulgence in his work made him the favourite of faculty and colleagues. He avidly helped PhD students with their work. His recent work in collaboration with his friends from the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi, on origins of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 using a computational approach reflected his knack to delve into the basic sciences as well. He was also among those few who inspired me to pursue hospital administration as a career. I wonder how many of us at AIIMS would endlessly try to see that a sick patient gets a bed after having exhausted the various possible options, but he was the one who would relentlessly pursue it till he succeeded. He was no less than a living God for parents of those sick children for whom he worked passionately without any expectation. From his display picture on WhatsApp as well, one could appreciate children touching and loving him in their own playful manner. That was Mohit, who might not have had many professional degrees to boast of, yet he was head and shoulders above many of his colleagues in terms of skill, compassion and clinical acumen.

With his sudden passing away, AIIMS has lost one of its most precious gems and an unsung hero, and I have lost a dear friend, a true well-wisher and above all, the most selfless human being who could go to any extent to help me and never asked for anything in return.

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