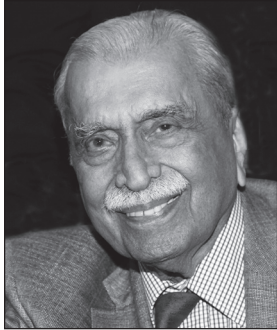


# Obituary

## Noshir Hormusjee Wadia

(20 January 1925–10 April 2016)



### A DOYEN OF INDIAN NEUROLOGY

The birth of Neurosciences, both basic and clinical, in India virtually coincides with our Independence. Professor Baldev Singh, the first Head of Department of Neurology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, who initiated the specialty at Christian Medical College, Vellore in 1951, is acknowledged to be the founder of

Neurology in India. He was followed by Dr T.K. Ghosh in Calcutta (present Kolkata); Drs E.P. Bharucha, N.H. Wadia and A.D. Desai in Bombay (present Mumbai); and Dr K.S. Mani in Bangalore (present Bengaluru), among others.

Born on 20 January 1925 in Surat, Gujarat, Dr Wadia received his medical education at the Grant Medical College, Bombay. He obtained the MBBS degree in 1948, MD (Medicine) in 1950, and MRCP (London) in 1952. He spent the next four years (1952–56) specializing in Neurology at Newcastle and London, UK. His brilliant academic record led to his selection as a Registrar under the most renowned British Neurologist of the era, Lord Brain, to work at the famous National Hospital for Nervous Diseases and the London Hospital.

Young and highly trained, Noshir decided to return home and was appointed an Honorary Assistant Neurologist at the Grant Medical College and J.J. Hospital in 1957, where he rose to become Honorary Professor (1968–82) and was later appointed as Consultant for Life. He was invited to be Director, Neurology Department at the Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre in 1973 and later, Director Research, a position he adorned till the last.

An astute clinician and a much sought after teacher, Dr Wadia was keenly interested in advancing knowledge. Like several of his contemporaries, impressed by the differences between the pattern and presentation of neurological diseases in India as compared to those observed in the West, where they were trained, Dr Wadia soon started to carefully study and report these. Thus, his earliest publications, 'Myelopathy complicating congenital atlanto-axial dislocation' published in *Brain* in two parts (1965;**88**:897–924; 1967;**90**:49–72), and 'Spinal meningitis with radiculo-myelopathy' in *J Neurol Sci* (1969;**8**:239–60; 1969;**8**:261–97) remain classics even today. Similarly, his investigations on manganese toxicity in workers in the ferro-manganese plants resulted in the oft-quoted study: 'The toxic effects of heavy metals on the nervous system' (*Neurol India* 1964;**12**:29–41). Besides papers on some uncommon neurological disorders in India such as SMON, Wilson's disease and higher prevalence of multiple sclerosis among Parsis (otherwise uncommon in India), he described two new diseases not previously reported in the world: (i) a new form of heredo-familial spinocerebellar degeneration with slow-eye movements (*Brain* 1971;**94**:359–74; and several others); and (ii) a polio-like illness associated with epidemic conjunctivitis (Enterovirus 70 disease) (*Lancet* 1972;**2**:970–1; *Lancet* 1973;**1**:350–2; *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry* 1983;**46**:599–610). He not only provided detailed clinical

features but also correlated these to the underlying pathology. He published over 130 papers and a dozen chapters in prestigious books showing that busy clinicians, even with their heavy workload, have time to contribute to new knowledge. Not satisfied with his internationally recognized scientific contributions, owing to his passion to project Indian neurology, he published two books highlighting the neurological disease scenario in India and contributions of Indian neuroscientists (Wadia NH [ed]. *Neurological practice*. 1st ed; 2005; and Wadia NH, Khadilkar SV. *Neurological practice*, 2nd ed, New Delhi:Elsevier India; 2015).

Dr Wadia while providing exemplary service to the neurologically disabled in Maharashtra was called upon for his advice nationally as a Member of the Expert Committee on Neurology (1963–66) and as a Member of the Scientific Advisory Board (1989–91) of the Indian Council of Medical Research. He served initially as a chairperson of the Governing Body and later as president of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

His contributions to world neurology were recognized by the World Federation of Neurology, which conferred on him the Certificate of Appreciation for Services to Neurology (1993). He was the first recipient of the prestigious Medal and Prize for service to International Neurology in 2009.

Dr Wadia was a recipient of a large number of awards and recognitions which included the first R.D. Birla Award for an Outstanding Practicing Clinician in Modern Medicine (1999); S.S. Bhatnagar Medal (2003) and Shri Dhanwantari Prize (2006) of the Indian National Science Academy; and Lifetime Achievement Award in Medical Excellence by Harvard Medical International and Wockhardt Ltd. for pioneering and immense contributions in the specialty of Neurology (2003).

Dr Wadia was the President of the Neurological Society of India (1963–64). He was an elected Fellow of the National Academy of Medical Sciences (1972), Indian Academy of Sciences (1983), and Indian National Science Academy (1986). In addition, he was conferred the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians, London (1972); elected Honorary Member of the Sociedad Neurologica, Argentina (1961); Sociedad Chilena de Neurologica (1961); American Neurological Association (1977) and a Foreign Member of the Association of British Neurologists (1979). He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2012.

I have had the privilege to be counted among his friends. He was a gentleman in the classical mould, polite, courteous, modest to a fault and with an old-worldly sense of humour. He leaves behind a loving wife Piroja, to whom in his own words, 'I owe an immense debt of gratitude . . . my often unappreciated and silent partner in much of work and research . . . '.

In the passing away of Dr Wadia on 10 April 2016, India in particular and the neurology community internationally have lost a caring physician, a dedicated teacher and a brilliant mind.

P.N. TANDON  
Emeritus Professor  
All India Institute of Medical Sciences  
New Delhi  
and  
National Research Professor

DR. SUNIL K. PANDYA, *Dr Wadia's student at the Grant Medical College and Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Hospital in Mumbai, adds:*

Blessed by teachers such as Dr Minocher Mody in Bombay and Lord Brain in London, UK, Dr Wadia developed into a skilled neurologist with elegant bedside manners. These were on display when he saw the poorest of patients at the J.J. Hospital and also when attending to the rich and powerful in his clinic, at Breach Candy Hospital or in the Bombay Hospital.

On his return from England, he pondered joining the then fledgeling All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi but his teacher, Dr Shantilal J. Mehta, then at the head of his *alma mater*, convinced him that Bombay needed him and appointed him on the staff of the J.J. Hospital. Dr Wadia's senior colleague, Dr Menino DeSouza, befriended him. Dr DeSouza's own interest in neurology had attracted referrals from other physicians in the hospital. These, he now referred to Dr Wadia, giving him some of his own beds for in-patient treatment.

As Dr Wadia's reputation in clinical neurology grew, so did the facilities offered to him by the hospital. When the old, historic hospital building was pulled down and the new, towering (in relative terms) building was opened to patients, Dr Wadia got a full-fledged male ward on its fourth floor. (Dr Gajendra Sinh, his dear friend and neurosurgical colleague, was provided a similar ward on the same floor. They shared the female and children's ward between them.)

Over time, Drs Wadia and Gajendra Sinh were able to attract Dr J.N. Sidhva, Bombay's first neuro-radiologist, who returned to J.J. Hospital after training at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases at Queen Square, London, UK. A little later, Dr Darab Dastur moved into the Postgraduate Laboratories of the Grant Medical College with his Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Department of Neuropathology. These four clinicians worked in harmony, resulting in excellent patient care and clinical research. (I have not erred in including Dr Darab Dastur as a clinician. His fame rested as much on his clinical assessment of patients whose specimens he studied as on the pathological techniques used for further analysis.)

Drs Wadia and Gajendra Sinh were honorary professors and were expected to work in the hospital for four hours. The honorarium paid to them did not even cover their petrol bills for travel to and from J.J. Hospital. In fact, they were almost always to be found in

the hospital outpatient clinic, wards and laboratories (and, in Dr Gajendra Sinh's case in the operation theatre) from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Their loyalty to the college and hospital was inspiring.

Dr Wadia's weekly clinics at the J.J. Hospital attracted students from all the medical colleges in the city and some seniors as well. Dr S.D. Bhandarkar, already a teacher in medicine at the K.E.M. Hospital, attended these clinics regularly and later spoke fondly of Dr Wadia's inimitable style of teaching. As a student I recall being taught some unforgettable lessons. Let me give you two examples. Since attending Dr Wadia's clinics on the subjects, I have always examined the back in any patient with a non-healing ulcer in the foot to look for tell-tale signs of spina bifida and have always asked patients undergoing caesarean sections or other operations in the lower half of the body about spinal anaesthesia. The latter lesson was brought home in a patient with non-tuberculous spinal leptomeningitis where this history was crucial in identifying the cause.

Drs Wadia, Gajendra Sinh and Darab Dastur also ingrained into us the need for meticulous case notes on every patient seen by us. (This was later reinforced in my case by Dr Homi Dastur's own case records.)

Dr Wadia's retirement from J.J. Hospital did not mean resting on his laurels. He once again heeded his teacher's call and joined Dr Shantilal Mehta's Jaslok Hospital to set up a new department of neurology, this time with full-fledged sections on electrophysiology, neurochemistry, epilepsy, movement disorders and, with Dr Anil Desai's help, diseases of the muscles.

Dr Wadia was inspired to pass on lessons learnt by him over a lifetime. This resulted in *Neurological practice: An Indian perspective*. The second edition was brought out with the help of Dr Satish Khadilkar, current Professor of Neurology at the J.J. Hospital.

Dr Wadia derived immense pleasure from the successes of his students. In turn, they honoured him and it was a treat to see the last great occasion a couple of years ago, when the anatomy lecture theatre of the Grant Medical College, packed with past students from all over the world, erupted in applause as Dr Wadia approached the microphone. Dr Wadia enthusiastically joined them as they chanted over and over again, 'Who are we? G.M.C.'

The obituary notice in *The Times of India* on Monday, 11 April 2016 was appropriately headed, 'Now I lay me down to rest.' A rest truly well deserved.