

Obituary

A. S. Fenn

(15 October 1928–24 October 1999)



A legend has passed away. Dr Anantha Shanti Fenn passed away at Vellore on 24 October 1999, just nine days after his seventy-first birthday. He was then the Director of the Bethesda Hospital at Ambur, which he took over on retirement from the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore in 1988.

Son of a priest, he was a highly principled, deeply spiritual person whose life and work reflected this aspect of his personality.

Dr Fenn joined the Christian Medical College and Hospital in 1953 as a Senior House Surgeon and retired as Professor and Head of Surgery in 1988. When Dr Fenn was a young surgeon in the 1950s, general surgery was all-encompassing and included all the present-day specialties. Dr Fenn was a visionary and realized that if surgery was to progress, then specialties must develop. He developed paediatric, vascular and endocrine surgery and trained young surgeons to head these specialties. It was during his term as Principal from 1971 to 1978 that several new disciplines were started at this institution.

Dr Fenn was a dedicated teacher and a favourite among students. He made a popular principal and the students had a great rapport with him. He motivated young students and brought out the best in them. He kept an open house for students who enjoyed his generous hospitality.

Dr Fenn was a surgeon par excellence and the speed with which he performed surgery was legendary. He had deep concern for the economically disadvantaged and for this sensitivity and compassion, he will forever be remembered with affection and appreciation.

As a person, the range of Dr Fenn's interests was remarkable—books, music, gardening, farming. His reading habits, as seen

from his vast collection of books, went far beyond the confines of his profession. His music included classical, spiritual, jazz, country and pop. As for gardening, it was a joke that one could see neither the man nor the manor for the lush growth of ferns, flowering plants and trees around his house. All, nevertheless, meticulously selected and landscaped. He always had a number of dogs nurtured with great affection and no discipline. He enjoyed entertaining in his well-appointed house at his lavish table. Despite these varied interests and involvements, his first and unrivalled love was surgery. He remained a bachelor.

He was a member of the Association of Surgeons of India (ASI) and attended their annual and regional meetings regularly, to which he would take all his colleagues and make them present papers. Academically inclined, his work extended to thyroid disorders, peptic ulcers and thromboangiitis obliterans. He had the largest series of patients with adrenal disorders in the country. He published over 60 papers and wrote several chapters in various books.

In 1995, he delivered the Pandalai Oration at the National Conference of the Association of Surgeons of India (ASI) in Bangalore. He was a member of the Governing Council of the ASI and on the editorial board of the *Indian Journal of Surgery*. He was an undergraduate and postgraduate examiner for the National Board of Examinations, Inspector for the Medical Council of India and Advisor to the Union Public Service Commission.

Among the many awards conferred on him was the Immanuel Sunder Ran Prize for outstanding services in surgery in mission hospitals.

When on retirement from CMC, Dr Fenn was invited to revive a hospital in Ambur that had remained closed for 18 months, he took it up as a challenge. As an able and sensitive administrator, his in-depth involvement in every aspect of the Bethesda Hospital rejuvenated and developed it to become a self-sufficient, 200-bedded, multi-specialty hospital with even a nursing school attached to it.

Dr Fenn was a doyen among surgeons and his passing away leaves a void that will be difficult to fill.

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LAKSHMI FENN