

Indian Medical Colleges

Sri Venkateswara Medical College and Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia (SVRR) Government General Hospital, Tirupati

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‘Medical education, medical research, medical care and the health of the people are intimately interrelated. The quality of medical care is vastly improved by the presence of a teaching hospital and college in any area and again the quality of medical education improves greatly in an atmosphere of medical research.’

—K. N. Rao, on the eve of the inauguration of Sri Venkateswara Medical College¹

INTRODUCTION

‘*Janani janmabhumischa svargadapi gariyasi*’ extols the greatness of the mother and place of birth. A medical college is the mother and birth place of a doctor. Six medical colleges, including Sri Venkateswara Medical College, Tirupati, started functioning in 1960² and have entered their golden jubilee year. The timeline of events has been chronicled in various publications.³⁻⁸

SRI VENKATESWARA MEDICAL COLLEGE AND ‘RUIA HOSPITAL’

For centuries, the shrine of Lord Venkateswara (Balaji) at Tirumala in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh has been an important place of pilgrimage and people from all over the world come to seek the Lord’s blessings. In the late 1950s, this town had meagre access to modern medical facilities. Sri Radhakrishna Ramnarain Ruia of Mumbai, a devotee of Lord Balaji, thought of starting a 100-bedded hospital at Tirupati, located at the foot of the Tirumala hills, to cater to the medical needs of the pilgrims and general public. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the trust that runs the holy shrine at Tirumala, supplemented his donation with a contribution and persuaded the Government of Andhra Pradesh to establish and run a hospital. The government sanctioned the establishment of a medical college at Tirupati on 9 April 1960. The TTD leased 200 acres of land and Sri Venkateswara Medical College (popularly called SVMC; Fig. 1) was inaugurated on 25 July 1960. The inscription in the logo of the college says *deo favente* (‘with the favour of God’), and the hope was that with the blessings of Lord Venkateswara (Balaji) and the cooperation of the government, this institution would offer the best healthcare in all fields of medicine to people from all over India.¹

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In the same year, a 100-bed hospital Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital, named after Ramnarain, father of Radhakrishna Ruia (popularly known as ‘Ruia Hospital’, Fig. 2) was ready, along with a 32-bed Infectious Diseases hospital and a 35-bed Tuberculosis ward. The foundation stone for the Ruia Hospital was laid by Morarji Desai on 10 April 1959, the then Union Finance Minister, and the hospital was inaugurated by Lal Bahadur Shastri on 24 September 1962, the then Union Minister for Home Affairs. The first batch of 50 students started the course in 1961. The existing Taluk Hospital at Tirupati was converted into the Hospital for Women and Children (Fig. 3) and in 1963, the Rural Health Centre, Chandragiri (Fig. 4) was established to serve as the field practice



Fig 1a. Sri Venkateswara Medical College was located in the newly constructed Infectious Diseases hospital, 1961



Fig 1b. Sri Venkateswara Medical College, 2009

area. The TTD-run Leprosarium at Akkarampalle was attached to the institution for teaching purposes. Hostels for men and women students, a recreation hall, an auditorium, a cloak room and an examination hall were all provided. Public utility services, such as a post office and bank, were located on the campus. Staff quarters were provided to a limited extent. The library of the college was one of the finest till 1986, when the facilities were centralized to the Andhra Pradesh University of Health Sciences, with a linkage to all medical colleges in the state, and the library lost some of its sheen. However, thanks to the Medical Council of India (MCI) regulations, the facilities have been upgraded since the year 2000 and a project linking it to the National Medical Library, New Delhi is in progress.

Till the MB,BS course was integrated from July 1961, pre-professional training was conducted in Sri Venkateswara University College and later, in Sri Venkateswara Arts College in Tirupati.⁵ In the initial stages, the final year medical students were posted to the Institute of Mental Health in Hyderabad for training in psychiatry.

In 1966, another year to cherish, the MCI conducted an inspection to accord recognition to the MB,BS degree and the first batch of students graduated in 1967. A formal recognition was granted in 1969. By 1964, the admission capacity was increased to 100 and this was again increased to 150 in the year



Fig 2a. Newly constructed teaching hospital, Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital, 1962



Fig 2b. Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital, 2009

2000. In 1975–76, postgraduate courses were started. At present, postgraduate degree and diploma courses are offered in almost all disciplines. In 1986, the affiliation of the college was transferred to the Andhra Pradesh University of Health Sciences (now renamed the Dr N.T.R. University of Health Sciences), Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. At present, the college has 260 faculty members, and 150 undergraduate and 70 postgraduate students are admitted every year.

Activities such as clinico-pathological conferences, grand rounds, general clinics, integrated teaching, medicosocial work, student research activities, extension work, field training and health camps are conducted regularly to enhance the learning experience. A Child Guidance clinic entailing interdisciplinary participation and medicosocial work is a special attraction to some and a burden to others! There is an Academy of Medical Sciences, devoted to developing the presentation skills of undergraduate and postgraduate students, which conducts monthly meetings. Over the last decade, 'small group teaching' has gained importance at the college. Groups of 3 to 6 students are posted for clinical clerkship. This gives much scope for close supervision and training.

Enough scope has been created for extracurricular activities. The National Cadet Corps (NCC) unit functioned in the campus in the initial years under the stewardship of 2nd Lt K. V. S. Mani, who was also the Physical Director and wielded influence with students and staff. The National Service Scheme (NSS) unit undertakes various activities to foster team spirit through service to the community. This institution was the first to post medical students to a primary health centre (PHC) for training through the Re-orientation of Medical Education (ROME) programme. Students resided in the village and faculty members visited the PHC every day to impart clinical and field training to the students. For 5–6 years, a Rotaract Club functioned in the college. Weekly health clinics were regularly organized in villages nearby from 1979 to 1981. This project was carried out in partnership with the Rotary Club of Tirupati and the Youth Club of the village concerned. Students, residents and the faculty participated in this activity. In sports, there has been representation in hockey, cricket, table tennis and chess at the university level and above. There is active participation in cultural activities. Youth festivals have been conducted by the students themselves. Two such events are named 'Synergy' and 'Sparks'.

Dr Venkataramiah, the first principal, with foresight, secured the land allotted to the college by erecting a compound wall at a considerable cost. People jocularly likened it to the 'Great Wall of China'. Since then, the facilities of the institution have been upgraded step by step to cater to the increasing requirements to maintain standards. A separate postgraduate hostel has come up. The clinical facilities are being upgraded. A separate traumatology, cardiology and outpatient department (OPD) blocks were constructed in 1981. A well-equipped radiotherapy unit was started in 1986. A regional block for psychiatry came up in 1994. The paediatric medicine and surgery departments have been upgraded and a separate paediatrics block with 300 beds was inaugurated by the late Dr Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, in February 2009. A modern blood bank and transfusion medicine wing has also come up. The Government Maternity Hospital started functioning in the newly constructed buildings from 2005 (Fig. 3b). The casualty and acute medical care unit shifted to the newly constructed premises in 2009. A separate block for



FIG 3a. Taluk Hospital at Tirupati converted into Hospital for Women and Children, which later became the Government Maternity Hospital, Tirupati



FIG 3b. Government Maternity Hospital, Tirupati, new building, 2005



FIG 4. Rural Health Centre, Chandragiri

medicine is under construction and is likely to be completed in a year.

A Medical Education Technology Unit has been started and some of the members have been trained at the National Teacher Training Centre (NTTC), Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry

(formerly Pondicherry) and at the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW), New Delhi. Annual courses in research methodology are being conducted now and workshops in teaching–learning methods have been planned.

Over the years, paramedical courses have also been started. A multipurpose health worker (female) training school and school of nursing are functioning. The Sri Padmavathi College of Nursing, for running the BSc (Nursing) course with 100 students per year was inaugurated on 27 October 2009.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

The founder Principal of the college, Dr C. Venkataramiah, had the distinction of starting 3 medical colleges in southern India, and cautioned that to start a new medical college is one thing and to establish high teaching standards is another.⁴

A review of the career history of the alumni of this college proves that they did not fail him. Many of them obtained their doctoral degrees from prestigious institutions such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi; Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh; JIPMER, Puducherry; and National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, to name a few in diverse fields. Some undergraduate students were awarded the Short-term Research Studentship of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and a few were selected under the Talent Search Scheme (TSS) Fellowship of the Council. The alumni of the college have been selected for positions under State and Central government organizations, work in public and private sector undertakings, as well as corporate hospitals, and many have acquitted themselves well overseas.

The Sri Venkateswara Medical College Old Students' Association was formed in 1982. On the initiative of the association, which holds annual celebrations, the open-air auditorium was named after Dr Venkataramiah.

Many seminars, workshops and conferences are conducted at the Sri Venkateswara Medical College every year.

OUR MASTERS

Dr P. Prabhakara Raju, Professor of Anatomy, demystified anatomy and desensitized medical students from the phobia of anatomy. He was affable and reduced the psychological distance between students and teachers in a natural manner. Students fondly recall how he became one with them while participating in sports and games. Dr K. B. V. Somasundaram, Professor of Physiology and later principal of the college, serviceman that he was, meticulously inculcated discipline among the students, both in studies and life in general. Being interviewed by him was a memorable experience for a freshman. The student would be scrutinized by the faculty members for his/her grooming and demeanour before being ushered into his presence. Dr Venkatasubbu, Professor of Pharmacology and later principal, is remembered for his administrative capabilities and his 'ferocious' nature while dealing with troublemakers. Dr A. V. S. S. Rama Rao, Professor of Biochemistry and later principal, was a 'teacher to teachers' and was a moderating influence in shaping the destiny of the college. Dr M. K. R. Krishnan, Professor of Forensic Medicine was rated very highly as a teacher by one and all. The publications by the faculty—textbooks on biochemistry by Dr A. V. S. S. Rama Rao and forensic medicine by Dr M. K. R. Krishnan—are read by a wide section of students in Andhra Pradesh and the neighbouring states.

Dr C. S. Bhaskaran, Professor of Microbiology, who later became Director of Medical Education, Andhra Pradesh and Vice Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh University of Health Sciences, nurtured the students' interest in immunology and rendered great service to the college library, which he went out of his way to maintain. Dr D. Krishnamurthy, or 'Dicky Master', nurtured the artistic and histrionic talents of the students. Dr S. L. Sagar, Professor of Social and Preventive Medicine (SPM), is remembered for his marathon classes. He maintained the Rural Health Centre (RHC) as a 'model field practice area'. Dr C. Savithri, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and later principal, was an ideal teacher whose capabilities in teaching and training were such that students who did not initially evince interest in the subject later decided to specialize in the same subject! Dr T. E. Seshachari, Professor of Surgery, was quite popular with the students and used to take pride in the fact that 'S3 (referring to his unit, Surgery Unit 3) patients can be found all over the world'. He taught his students the trick of 'guess and reverse' while answering questions. Dr K. Indira Bai played 'authoritarian' mother to all students, especially to women students, as she was the warden of the women's hostel for a long time. Dr K. B. Krishnamohan, Professor of Medicine and later principal, a renowned and meticulous physician, was held in awe by one and all and everyone who came in touch with him must still be hearing his sweet voice. The well-known surgeon, Professor E. N. B. Sarma, was an eminent teacher who was considered a role model. Students remember how, as fourth examiner sitting in the last room, he used to come out to receive the student affectionately and enquire gently about his/her performance with other examiners. Dr R. N. Sarma, another notable student- and patient-friendly teacher, fostered the spirit of enquiry and research and is remembered by many. For the first clinical year students of the 1970s, Medicine Unit 3 was a favourite abode. Dr K. Raja Reddy and Dr G. Subramanyam were favourites with the students. Dr G. Subramanyam, who became Professor of Cardiology, was President of the Doctors' Association at the state level for a long period and recently (in 2009) relinquished the post of Director of Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS), Tirupati after rendering distinguished service for about a decade. Dr B. Vengamma, Professor of Neurology, who succeeded Dr G. Subramanyam as Director, SVIMS is an alumnus of S.V. Medical College.

Most of the teachers of the past believed in and practised the principle of 'strictness tempered by mercy' and left an indelible mark on the minds of their students.

Silver Jubilee Celebrations

The Silver Jubilee was celebrated belatedly in 1988–89. The celebrations coincided with the completion of 25 years of the commencement of the RHC at Chandragiri. It all started on a modest scale at the field practice area on 1 September 1988 and continued through 1989. A number of programmes were organized. At the college, inter-medical college competitions in fine arts, sports and games were held. An exhibition for educating the public was hugely popular. The Sri Venkateswara Medical College Old Students' Association raised funds for the Silver Jubilee celebrations.

Millennium Meet

A millennium meet was organized in 2000, when alumni and faculty from various parts of the world came together for two days of interaction, sharing memories and planning for the future.



FIG 5. Bronze statue honouring the founder Principal of Sri Venkateswara Medical College, Dr C. Venkataramiah erected at the entrance of the college on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebrations

Golden Jubilee Celebrations

The Golden Jubilee celebrations were started with a Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme on 25 July 2009. The celebrations were inaugurated by the TTD Trust Board Chairman, D. K. Audikesavulu Naidu. CMEs every month and various cultural activities are planned throughout the Golden Jubilee year (2009–10). The closing ceremony is to be held on 24 July 2010.

Problems

The institution was started under fortuitous conditions, with little planning. Since the faculty appointments at the senior level are by transfer, many faculty members preferred not to stay. Administrative difficulties were encountered when the terms of many senior faculty members ended in 1982 due to a change in the age of superannuation, during the transition period of setting up of the Andhra Pradesh University of Health Sciences in 1986 and, for a brief period, when administrative control was shifted to the TTD. The medical and health services were trifurcated into Health, Medical Education and Commissionerate of Medical Services (Andhra Pradesh Vaidya Vidhana Parishad), leading to a bit of a shake-up in the composition of manpower.

The effects were certainly felt in the academic arena. Confusion regarding seniority and legal battles arising from this, and successive MCI inspections for recognition of enhanced seats and postgraduate degrees all had positive as well as negative effects. With the liberalization in the area of the establishment of new colleges in the private sector, increasing rate of specialization, and contract system of recruitment of faculty, difficulties have been encountered in recruiting qualified faculty and retaining them.

Since the establishment of the Sri Venkateswara Ayurvedic Medical College in 1983 and SVIMS in 1993, at Tirupati, with the support of the TTD, the Sri Venkateswara Medical College has had to compete with them to secure resources from the government and the TTD. As the funding agencies want to optimize resources and avoid duplication, some of the departments in the medical college are not able to get assistance from the authorities. With the passage of time, a semblance of normalcy is being restored, but gradually.

The existing specialty services, such as cardiology, neurology, neurosurgery, paediatric surgery, urology and plastic surgery, need to be strengthened.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Since this is a government institution, future development depends on government policies and priorities. It is important to consolidate the works and projects initiated. Instead of expanding further, attention needs to be paid to improving the standards of service in teaching and patient care. A department of physical medicine and rehabilitation is likely to be established for starting a postgraduate course.

CONCLUSIONS

For the past 50 years, Sri Venkateswara Medical College has been one of the key players in the arena of medical education

in India and Ruia Hospital has been occupying pride of place in the medical and health sector of Andhra Pradesh, rendering medical services free of cost to the people of Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur, Nellore and the neighbouring districts of Tamil Nadu.

In the words of a student:⁸

*'If I were to look over the whole world...
To find out a place most richly endowed with
Friendship, love, kindness, unity in diversity
That nature can bestow...
A very paradise on earth
I should point to SVMC'*

Let us nurture this institution and work hard to preserve 'the reputation for academic excellence and disciplined life'.

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