

## Obituary

### Bibhuti Bhusan Tripathy

(3 January 1923 to 1 April 2010)



Professor Bibhuti Bhusan Tripathy, a doyen and pioneer in medicine, a physician who changed thinking and had a major impact on diabetes research in post-Independent India, passed away a few months ago after 5 decades of teaching, research and clinical service marked by a passion and intensity few can match. Throughout his career he worked in Orissa, a state where infrastructure for research till date is negligible.

Yet Professor Tripathy laid the foundation for path-breaking research in the area of malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus and provided new concepts, definitions, classifications and a strategy to manage such patients. In the eastern region of India, he was a giant in medicine, who by his tenacity, vision and hard work changed the approach to medical education, research and service in the entire region.

Professor Tripathy completed his MB,BS in 1948, his MD in Pharmacology in 1955 and MD in General Medicine in 1956 from Patna. For his outstanding research in diabetes mellitus he was bestowed with a degree of DSc by the Utkal University. From 1964 till he superannuated in August 1980, Professor Tripathy served as Professor and Head of Medicine, Principal and Medical Superintendent at various times in the 3 government-run medical institutions in Orissa.

For the first time in 1960, Professor Tripathy described malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus (MRDM) and its possible pathogenesis as a distinct entity which was known as 'J' type diabetes and was accepted as an entity by WHO in 1980. He also provided the initial concepts on diabetic cardiomyopathy and glycaemic index in the 1970s and 1980s, which subsequently were established as important contributions in advancing knowledge in the field of diabetes. Professor Tripathy described the profile of fibrocalculous pancreatic disease (FCPD) from Orissa. He also described the lean type 2 diabetes in contrast to type 2 diabetes in the West where patients were obese. These studies in diabetes got him national and international recognition and invitations to lecture at several international diabetes fora. His work and eminence was recognized by professionals in India and is reflected by the fact that he became President of the Association of Physicians of India (1984–85), President, Diabetic Association of India (1971–72), and President of the Research Society for

Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI; 1978–80) and continued as its patron till his demise. He published 175 original research papers in national and international journals and received numerous national and international awards and orations. He was the editor-in-chief of the RSSDI *Textbook of diabetes*, first published in 2002, which has now become the textbook for diabetes in south Asia. He was an active member of the Editorial Board of this *Journal*.

Professor Tripathy was a teacher and mentor par excellence. He guided many postgraduate students in Orissa, and mentored them towards academic careers, many of whom have contributed considerably to medical education and research in India. I trained under Professor Tripathy as an undergraduate and postgraduate student from 1970 to 1980. He was a hard worker who worked continuously from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. I distinctly remember that one of his main thrust was to train young physicians to become physician scientists. He established many laboratories in the department of medicine at S.C.B. Medical College, Cuttack, which included the endocrinology laboratory that routinely performed sophisticated radioimmunoassay in the 1970s and 1980s. He was instrumental in establishing the pulmonary function, haematological and renal laboratories at the medical college. As young postgraduates, we were posted to these laboratories to get exposed to laboratory techniques. Today, translational research is the buzz word in medicine. Three decades ago, Professor Tripathy realized this was the way forward and tried his best to implement the concept of a 'Physician scientist'. In the 1950s and 1960s when Professor Tripathy started his career in Orissa, there was no infrastructure or financial support for collaborative research, the concept of finding our own solutions to our own problems were alien to the medical fraternity in most parts of India and certainly in Orissa. Against this background, Professor Tripathy not only researched into problems related to diabetes that he encountered, but provided an insight into diabetes in the poor and underprivileged populations of the eastern region. He identified new, distinct entities, and described their pathogenesis and a rational strategy for management.

His tenacity, hard work and single-minded dedication were unique. His achievements and contributions were exemplary. His loss is irreplaceable to the medical community in India. His wife had passed away about a year earlier. He leaves behind a son and two daughters who are well settled in life.

All his students, colleagues and patients deeply mourn his demise and will miss the dynamic 'Physician scientist' who will continue to remain a role model for many bright and young physicians of India.

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