

Presidential Address

The 42nd All India Obstetric and Gynaecology Congress

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27th December, 1998.



Our honoured chief guest Shri Chandrababu Naidu, Guest of Honour Health Minister Dr. N. Janardan Reddy, Former chief secretary of Andhra Pradesh Mr. K. Madhavrao, Dr. Anji Reddy, Chairman, Dr. Reddy's Lab, my dear teacher Dr. C. G. Saraiya, immediate Past President Prof. Rajan, distinguished members on the dias, respected Past Presidents, invited international and national guests, Chairman and members of the Organising committee and dear colleagues.

It is indeed appropriate that the 42nd All India Obstetric and Gynaecological Congress (AICOG) which is taking us to the very threshold of a new millennium is being held in the pace setting and happening city of Hyderabad and it is a pleasure for us to be here.

Life is a sequence of events some happy, some not so happy, some exalting and some overwhelming. but only a few of these can be forever cherished as landmarks in one's life.

For me standing here as the President of FOGSI is one such landmark. I am indeed grateful to each and every member of FOGSI because it is you who have bestowed on me this opportunity and honour which has on its roster

an array of eminent names. Of all my aspirations in my professional life, I rate this recognition by my peers as the most rewarding and as the pinnacle of achievement.

I am overwhelmed and I accept this awesome responsibility with humility and hope my contribution will further strengthen this magnificent edifice built by my worthy predecessors.

On the shoulders of giants

On this very important day for me, I would like to pay respect to my teacher Dr. C. G. Saraiya who taught me not just the art and the science of Obstetrics and Gynaecology but how to practice medicine as a good doctor and to live life as a good human being. It gives me immense pleasure to see him sitting here in front of me today.

History moves forward upon the shoulders of great individuals. FOGSI has achieved its current exalted status thanks to the contributions and vision of a distinguished roll of Past Presidents. I take this opportunity to thank my predecessors for their dedicated efforts in laying the foundations for advances in our speciality to benefit women's health.

A spring board to the future

I am extremely happy that Hyderabad is playing host to the congress after a gap of four decades. This four century old city has grown and matured in the last decade into a fast expanding, hi-tech, scientific, medical and pharmaceutical centre of our country under the dynamic leadership of Honourable Shri Chandrababu Naidu, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. It has a glorious past and an ambitious promising future, vivid glimpses of which are beautifully outlined in our artistic brochure.

Through my contact with the organising committee, I

have come to believe that the Hyderabadi people are hardworking and have an abundance of warmth, affection and above all humility which makes them adorable. I would like to acknowledge the remarkable work done by Dr. Pulpalatha and her dedicated team. It is to their drive, care for detail and touch of class that credit goes for the success of this congress. They have worked hard in a organised manner for the past two years. The well planned scientific and social programmes have reached delegates in time. Their exemplary efforts have set new pace for All India congresses of future.

A drive to better education

I have practiced Obstetrics and Gynaecology for more than three decades during which I constantly interacted with undergraduate and postgraduate students. Teaching is meant to provide the three elements of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for professional practice. Of the three elements, I found that cultivating the right attitudes and unlearning wrong habits are the most difficult to achieve.

Unfortunately examinations have today become mostly a travesty where seriousness of purpose and honesty are often lacking. With a new sense of discipline and hard work, is it too much to hope that the standard of examinations will improve, there will be more dedicated teachers and students will take their education far more seriously. Only then will they qualify themselves for the noble profession of medicine in a determined and devoted manner.

FOGSI plays a very important role to help our younger generation. We have 26 specialised committees, many of which are very active. Workshops, seminars and symposia organised all over the country by these committees in conjunction with local societies on basic and advanced technologies, address subjects that are not always included in our academic curricula. Practitioners and postgraduates take keen interest, learn and participate in these programmes. This is FOGSI's invaluable contribution to continuing medical education.

In the coming year FOGSI in collaboration with the ICOG and the Wadia Hospital in Mumbai will establish a trend

setting training in Maternal-Fetal Medicine, vascular ultrasonography, labour training and specialised outpatient care, for students who cannot get postgraduate seats. It is my fervent request to set up similar programmes to promote education and scientific temperament. I would like to thank Dr. Vandana Walvekar the Dean of Wadia Hospital and Dr. C. S. Dawn the Chairman of the ICOG for agreeing to implement this novel idea.

Our place in the world

Globalisation has made the world a smaller place. It is time for us to break out of our introversion so that India may stake its rightful claim to a place on the international stage. From this platform I request our senior as well as junior colleagues one and all to join our parent body - the International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (FIGO) whose president elect is our very own Dr. Shirish Sheth. He has done us proud and we must all be with him. His achievement honours the memories of the great Dr. V. N. Shirodkar and Dr. B. N. Purandare whose pioneering efforts first placed India on the world map of our speciality.

Our greatest challenge

While we stand poised on the threshold of the new millennium it is a good idea to pause a while and ponder over the achievements and the disappointments of the years gone by. Surely there are many successes and great ones at that, but the shadow of death, which looms large over all our mothers, puts them in shade. We cannot forget that for all its greatness, our country has amongst the worst figures for maternal mortality. Every three minutes a mother dies in the prime of life and it is tragic that about fourfifths of these deaths may actually be preventable with adequate medical care.

In our immediate neighbourhood Sri Lanka stands as shining example of having succeeded in reducing MMR drastically. This is attributed to free health care, free education, over eighty percent literacy among women, little gender disparity, rise in age of marriage and a significant decline in teen pregnancies.

So far we have all promoted safe motherhood and maternal health at various Obstetric and Gynaecological conferences at national and international meetings. We are now fortunate in getting help and assistance from Government of India, State Governments and UNICEF. Our new found partners welcome our active participation in achieving safe motherhood.

Our involvement with women's well-being should make our speciality the foremost proponents and supporters of women's rights to optimum health care and social status.

FOGSI year of adolescent girl 1999

The ultimate solution is surely the empowerment of women and this can only be achieved by education and the spread of awareness amongst the girls of our country. Taking this into account we at FOGSI have declared 1999 as the FOGSI YEAR OF THE ADOLESCENT GIRL because today's girl is tomorrow's mother. We sincerely believe that this strategy can make a difference.

All our efforts in providing health care and education in reproductive health and sexuality to women who have already become pregnant and giving birth to a child are a case of too little, too late. I believe that women require to be fortified with such training and education during adolescence. This will empower them to take decisions on their own and without being forced out of ignorance to do things which are potentially harmful.

During the year it is our aim to enlighten girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen years about the importance of their health, inform them about their rights, encourage their partnership in decision making and highlight importance of the future roles of child bearing, breast feeding and child rearing. This in my opinion is the first small step. If we can give this otherwise silent marginalised section of our society a voice that will be heard, we will have succeeded in our objective.

We the Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have been playing the role of organ healers, technicians and providers of episodic care to women for too long. I am convinced that we have the responsibility as well as opportunity to evolve our profession to meet women's

needs, perceptions and perspectives and to help overcome their problems. We need to create their confidence in us so that we can jointly solve their problems.

A encouraging recent study reports that the U.S.'s teen pregnancy rate is at a 20-year low. New data shows that the pregnancy rate in girls ages 15-19 in 1995 was the lowest rate since 1975. According to the Allan Guttmacher Institute factors for the decline are believed to be education campaigns urging abstinence, a conservative shift in teen sexual attitudes, and the fear of AIDS.

FOGSI is set to implement an ambitious blueprint with the help of UNICEF and industry. With the help of our past president Dr. D.K. Tank who is the inspiring force behind the project, we shall initially cover Maharashtra Karnataka and Gujarat with participation from Dr. Prataap kumar, Dr. Anklesaria and Dr. Parul Kotdawala. I acknowledge the generous support by Dr. Prakash Gurnani from UNICEF and Proctor and Gamble. The successful implementation of this project will be a dream come true.

Our women deserve a better deal in life and we can help make it happen. The road ahead should take us from Obstetrics and Gynaecology to women's health.

Coping with success

Advance means Progress to something better, no progress to something new. In the past two decades unparalleled progress has been achieved in the field of human reproduction, endoscopic surgery and imaging sciences which have added new dimensions to clinical practice and developed useful, revolutionary technologies.

At this juncture it is important for infertility specialists to recognise, "What it means to be infertile today." Quality control is really a matter of quality of life for the patient and there is an obligation on the part of physicians to do their best for patients in terms of cost and convenience while optimising success.

It is just twenty years ago with the birth of Louise Brown

the world's first Test tube baby, that progress in the field of Infertility truly began. And yet it is disconcerting that two decades hence, assisted reproductive technologies are still not an accessible option for many infertile couples. A thought provoking observation by Prof. Evers has made deep impression on me and I quote "The future of IVF lies in providing much cheaper and much less demanding treatment for women. The major task which faces us in Infertility clinics is choosing right option between expectant management and active management." Simplification of treatment protocols should aim at optimization not maximization.

And when we fail, we must learn to call it a day and help these couples to adopt a baby. In all my years in practice, I have yet to come across a couple who is unhappy after finally opting for adoption.

Infertility management is quickly approaching state of art. In few other branches of science has there been such consumer driven democratization, with rapid worldwide dissemination of knowledge and widespread availability of sophisticated facilities.

Of course these developments have brought their own unique problems and responsibilities. In our endeavor to generate awareness and provide the latest knowledge to our members on relevant contemporary aspects of infertility, FOGSI in conjunction with Mumbai Obstetric and Gynaecological Society (MOGS) will host World Congress on Practical Infertility Management in September 1999" at Mumbai.

We have already put together a distinguished International and National faculty to celebrate and deliberate the state of the art at the changing millennium. We look forward to your active participation.

Thanks to the vision and foresight of our past President Dr. Usha Krishna we have organised Indo-Swedish seminar on Maternal-Fetal Medicine all over the country.

Revamping our profession

Bertrand Russell has said "We have two kinds of moralities side by side. One of which we preach but do

not practice and another which we practice but seldom preach. "Our profession is going through difficult times. This has been attributed to knowledge gaps, lack of sustained learning, inadequate returns, unhealthy competition, fast changing systems and legal constraints.

An honest approach to patient care with developing personal relationships will help to overcome these problems. It is absolutely necessary to improve patient-doctor communication and rebuild mutual trust and faith.

Let us try and rear a generation of young doctors who will be well trained in art and science of obstetrics and gynaecology, who will not only know the latest but also fundamentals, who will not only read literature but will also think for themselves and undertake original research on problems facing our country and the welfare of our patients.

Above all let us prove Bertrand Russell wrong and practice what we preach.

I have aired some of my thoughts and I request you the esteemed members of our federation to join hands, and come together in a team approach to achieve the goals set.

I take this opportunity to thank my close friends Dr. Shirish Sheth, Dr. D.K. Tank, Dr. Sadhana Desai, Dr. Usha Krishna, Dr. Nozer Sheriar and my FOGSI team for their support and help. Of course I could have never achieved my dreams but for the support of my husband Dara and Hansotia Family for standing beside me day and night.

While much has been accomplished, much more needs to be done.

I conclude by sayings of Zarathustra

"Yesterday is beyond repair
Tomorrow may never come
Today alone is ours
Make the best use of it
As it is your sole possession"

My warmest wishes for the productive happy 1999.