

Dr. Ida S. Scudder

M.D., D.Sc., K-I-H

Date of Birth 9-12-1870

Date of demise May 1960



Dr Ida S. Scudder

Born on 9 December 1870, in Ranipet, Ida Sophia Scudder was the youngest of six children and only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. John Scudder, missionaries of the Arcot Mission of America. At the age of 8, in 1878, she was sent to school in America, returning to India in 1890 to nurse her mother when she became ill.

In 1895 Ida Scudder enrolled at the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia, transferring to Cornell University Medical School, New York, for her final year when that College first admitted women to the medical course in 1898.

Returning to Vellore in 1900, Dr. Scudder practised from a room in her father's house, which was consulting room, dispensary, ward, all put together until a hospital could be built. In 1902 the Mary Tabor Schell Hospital, with 40 beds, was opened.

In 1909 a lower grade Nurses Training School was opened.

Before long the challenge was set before Dr. Ida of starting a Union Medical College for Women. There were already 7 medical colleges for men. In 1918 Dr. Scudder started a lower grade Medical School for Women in Vellore.

In 1920 Dr. Scudder was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal for public service to India. In the same year work was begun on a new 267 bed hospital in Vellore town as the Schell Hospital had become inadequate for the increasing number of patients who came to see

Dr. Scudder and her team of doctors and nurses.

In 1924 as the new hospital was completed on the present site of Christian Medical College Hospital.

In 1927 Dr. Scudder, the hospital and town of Vellore were honoured by a visit from Mahatma Gandhi.

Over the years Dr. Scudder had acquired renown for her operation for vaginal fistula. In an article written for the American College of Surgeons in 1934, she claimed to have performed over 1,000 such operations. It was her infinite care and patience, as much as her brilliance as a surgeon that gave her such skill. For her an operation began long before the patient reached the table and ended only when the patient was completely healed. In 1934 she was made a Member of the American College of Surgeons and received the degree of Doctor of Science from Rutgers.

For the rest of her working life, Dr. Scudder crusaded to upgrade her Women's Medical School, which in 1932 had moved to a site four miles out of Vellore, to full university status. The Medical College was finally granted full affiliation to Madras University in 1947. The process of upgrading involved provision of male wards and admitting men students to the Medical College. Such was the graciousness of Dr. Scudder that she, who had campaigned so long and so courageously for women of India, could, when the times demanded, throw open the doors of her hospital to men patients and students.

Dr. Scudder was the President for the 1st All India Conference of Obstetrics and Gynaecology held at Madras in 1936. On her 89th birthday the people of Vellore presented her with a Ponnadai, cloth of gold, in recognition of the honour and respect in which she was held in the community and of the contribution she had made to the well-being of India.

Dr. Scudder retired in 1946 to live at her home in Kodaikanal. She continued to take an active interest in the hospital, patients, doctors and students until her death in May, 1960.