

Dialogue with the Stalwart

Interview with Prof.C.K.Dhanashekar

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Students know him as a flawless and dedicated teacher, colleagues know him as a perfectionist, patients know him as the most trustworthy maxillofacial surgeon, people who have worked under him know him as an able administrator; when we went to meet this interesting person, we saw a carefree, totally unassuming gentleman, completely immersed in his textbooks and study materials. Yes! We are talking about one of the persons who laid the strong foundation for the ever-developing field of oral and maxillofacial surgery in Chennai- Prof. C.K. Dhanashekar. He graduated in dentistry in 1957 and started his teaching career the same year. A two year posting at the Stanley Medical College gave him a wider exposure and contact with the medical profession. Between 1960 and 1962, he completed his post-graduation from the Nair Hospital and Dental College Bombay, that included a short term training at the Tata Memorial cancer hospital, which gave him a broader experience in the field of maxillofacial surgery. He continued his teaching career on his return to Chennai in 1962, and pursued it uninterrupted till 1979. For the next two years, he went on to work in Benghazi, Libya, where he got the opportunity to see a different student as well as patient population. It was during this period that he also was a consultant to the famous Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. On persistent invitation, he took over the responsibility of developing a new dental college, which now has its students scattered all over the globe.

CHC MJ Why did you choose dentistry as a profession and Oral and Maxillofacial surgery as a specialty?

Prof. CKD The BDS course was first introduced in 1953, and it was an opportunity for me to enter the prestigious Madras Medical College. Having gone in to dentistry the pep talk of the professor of general surgery Dr.A.Venugopal, about Canadian dentistry greatly influenced me. When people in Canada can do it, people in India can do it better.

CHC MJ What difficulties did you encounter in developing the new specialty of oral and maxillofacial surgery?

Prof. CKD As the specialty was new, it required considerable effort to convince medical colleagues to come out of the old mould of dentists being "tooth pullers".

CHC MJ What is your opinion about the current state of oral and maxillofacial surgery?

Prof. CKD In more than half a century the specialty has come a long way. The scope of Oral and Maxillofacial surgery is steadily increasing and the boundaries are considerably widening.

CHC MJ What is your idea about the present day reforms in curriculum in dentistry (need of the hour)?

Prof. CKD It requires a forward thinking to alter the curriculum. The curriculum as it stands today is based on old concepts. More stress will have to be placed on health care problems. In some areas there is a repetition which can be avoided. The curriculum should be modified to accommodate more of medical subjects.

CHC MJ What is your idea about the present day examination evaluation patterns for UG and PG?

Prof. CKD The present day examination is limited to the extent of retrieving knowledge in a short span of time, more importance must be given in problem solving and planning by the student.

CHC MJ What do you think about the current state of medical and dental education in India?

Prof. CKD Since we have followed the British system it has stood the test of time. A small dose of steps to improve the original thinking of the student will go a long way.

CHC MJ Where do you see healthcare in India?

Prof. CKD Considering the population and economic status, health care will have to be borne by the state. It may take long time for health insurance to reach all the population.

CHC MJ What is your advice to the general public about Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery?

Prof. CKD The specialty of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery is a bridge from general dentistry to general surgery. The maxillofacial surgeon should be aware and be competent to assume the role of bridge.

CHC MJ What is your advice to the youth of India?

Prof. CKD Irrespective of the field you choose, your aim should be to achieve the best. If it takes all your energy and effort to do it- do it.