Published online: 2020-05-14

On history of cleft surgery in India

Dear Sir,
It was extremely heartening to learn the history and evolution of cleft surgery in India, as mentioned by Adenwalla *et al*.[1]

I would like to compliment the authors on attempting to chronologically ascertain the rebirth of plastic surgery in India and fully appreciate the difficulties in gathering corroborative evidence for the same.

In this connection I would like to point out certain facts which may be hitherto unknown to the Indian Plastic Surgery fraternity:

In the years 1947-1948, operations for the correction of cleft lip and palate were being performed in Calcutta, by Dr. Prabhat Sanyal, a general surgeon. It was the pre-endotracheal tube era of anaesthesia and "Junker" anaesthesia was used by his team. Another paediatric surgeon, Dr. Umesh Chakraborty was also performing similar procedures at the Calcutta Medical College.

Between 1949-1951, Prof. Murari Mohan Mukherjee, while training in Plastic Surgery in the UK, was closely associated with Prof. Kilner. Upon his return to Calcutta, Prof. M. M. Mukherjee put into practice the techniques of cleft lip and palate repair he had witnessed in England. By 1955 his work was well appreciated and recognized in the state of West Bengal and in the year 1956, the Department of Plastic Surgery was formally opened in the old Presidency General Hospital (now SSKM Hospital). The inauguration of the new department was presided over by the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (then the Hon. Chief Minister of West Bengal) and Sir Benjamin Rank, who was in India at that time.

One must also mention the name of Prof. Anjali Mukherjee, (now an octogenarian), the first lady surgeon from West Bengal, who attained her MS degree in 1954, under the tutelage of renowned general surgeon Dr. Panchanan Chatterjee. When the plastic surgery workshop started at the old Presidency Hospital under the Colombo plan in Prof. M. M. Mukherjee's unit, Dr. Anjali Mukherjee was an indispensable part of the functioning of the unit in her capacity as Honorary Visiting Surgeon at Calcutta Medical College. She regularly assisted Sir Benjamin Rank and other surgeons in the workshop. Between 1955 to 1957 she performed all her cleft lip and palate surgeries in the paediatric unit of Calcutta Medical College. In 1957, under the Colombo plan she went to England for further training in plastic surgery.

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REFERENCE

1. Adenwalla HS, Narayanan PV, Rajshree CJ. The history and evolution of cleft surgery in India. Indian J Plast Surg 2005;38:188-91.