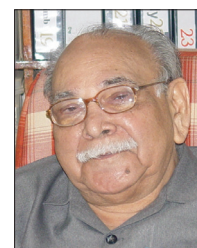


Icon of the issue

Dr. B.B. Joshi – A visionary Hand Surgeon



Dr. B.B. Joshi

Dr. Brij Bhushan Joshi was one of the pioneers of hand surgery not only in India but also was renowned for his knowledge, ingenuity and innovativeness the world over.

Dr. Joshi started his medical education at the prestigious K.E.M. Medical College in Lahore, then in undivided India, and later completed the degree course at the Grant Medical College and Sir J.J. Group of Hospitals, Bombay. He was the first M.S. in Orthopaedic surgery not only from Bombay University but also in India. He then moved to Delhi and was the youngest Chief of Surgery, at the age of 27 years, at the Lady Irwin Hospital, Delhi.

In 1962, his love for the city where he did his medical education brought him back to Bombay. He joined the M.G.M. Hospital in Parel, Bombay, where he worked tirelessly till he retired in 1986. Working at the M.G.M. Hospital meant dealing with a deluge of hand injuries, as it was an E.S.I.S. hospital. Workers, injured in factories and at their work places came with a wide spectrum of challenging problems. Many patients came with severely crushed and mutilated hands. Dr. Joshi had no formal training in hand surgery, as none existed in the country then. This led him to realize early in life that he had to find his own solutions to these peculiar and varied problems.

This was a blessing in disguise, for he was forced to invent his own techniques. When Dr. Joshi was presented with a blind patient who had fingertip injury of all his fingers,

he felt that this made the patient doubly blind as he could now neither see nor feel! This made him design his own sensory flaps for finger tips to give patients a chance to work with their hands again. Mr. Guy Pulvercraft recognized the genius of Dr. Joshi and encouraged him to take his work to a wider audience. Dr. Joshi was a reluctant speaker but he had brilliant original material which was obvious when he mesmerized the audience in the first meeting of the Indian Society of Surgery of the Hand (I.S.S.H) and later in England before an august international audience in 1973. He offered eight new sensory flaps that he had devised and earned instant and enduring respect of top hand surgeons of the world.

Dr. Joshi believed that in hand Surgery even the best surgical work would not produce desired results, unless it was complemented by appropriate post-operative splintage and physiotherapy. His work on simple and economic splints for the hand (using scrap materials like rubber tubing, chicken wire, aluminum strips and rubber bands) bears the hallmark of his genius. He concentrated on total rehabilitation of the patient, both physical and mental. He trained patients, who were skilled laborers, in a small workshop in the hospital, to fashion splints out of cheap and readily available material. One of his handicapped patients now has a small-scale industry making these splints at an affordable cost!

Always a visionary and always ahead of his time, retirement from MGM Hospital gave him the opportunity to explode to his fullest potential. Realising the importance of minimally invasive surgery and external fixators, he could not imagine to deny his patients these twin benefits just because the cost of the available gadgets were exorbitant. Once the mini blocks, from inside an electric plug, were put in his hands, there was no looking back. The effort he has made to devise a whole system

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of external stabilisation, around the humble yet versatile and economical link joint, was been phenomenal. What started as a simple fracture holding frame developed into a whole system that encompassed not only the treatment of trauma but also the correction of various congenital and acquired deformities, burns contractures and reconstruction of the thumb.

The versatility of this creation, spilled over to the feet when a patient's parent demanded correction of the clubfoot along with the ongoing treatment for radial club hand. The genius' mind set to work and the CTEV frame was created. The results were very encouraging and it is now accepted worldwide as a modality to treat clubfeet not amenable to non-operative methods. Over 300 workshops, to teach the orthopedic and plastic surgeons the scope and versatility of the external fixation device, were conducted by him and his prodigies all over the world and today the JESS techniques is an established and popular technique amongst all hand surgeons.

Dr. Brij Bhushan Joshi was a one-man institution and his students are doing brilliantly today to address the unfortunate victims of hand trauma all over India. His

generosity is exemplified by the fact that he chose not to patent the JESS fixator, so that it could be made available to a larger section of the medical fraternity and it can be kept affordable for the masses. His wish for "Vidyadaan" is being fulfilled by his associates in the form of a series of books showcasing his monumental work, with the hope that many surgeons, who read these books, will find the light of knowledge to guide them in their clinical decision making.

The entire collection of Dr. Joshi's books and original files and photographs of his patient records were donated to the library of Ganga Hospital, Coimbatore. Anyone interested in them can do so in the hospital library.

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