

I had the pleasure of working with Prof. Vimla Virmani during my AIIMS days. Prof. S. N. Pathak was then the Professor and Head of Neurology, as Prof. Baldev Singh had already moved out to Neurophysiology. Dr. Virmani did not get the Professor's post till Dr. Pathak died prematurely at the age of 52 years (26 Dec. 1975). Her interpersonal squabbles with Dr. Pathak caused a lot of problems for the residents. But I must give credit to both of them that they were quite fair to all of us. For the residents Dr. Virmani was quite a demanding person but intensely loyal. When I joined the department Dr. Pathak asked me to do couple of projects -one on sleep and another on intracranial tension. Dr. Virmani gave me another project on aphasias. To do all these together, along with preparing for the DM examination was quite a feat for me. Somehow, I could do these as both Dr. Pathak and Dr. Virmani were kind to me.

Dr. Virmani became the Professor and Head of the Dept of Neurology at AIIMS after the sad demise of Dr. S. N. Pathak. After her tenure in AIIMS, she was offered the Professorship of Neurology at Sree Chitra Thirunal Centre for Medical Sciences and Technology for a short while. She trained one of her protegee for becoming the Professor of Neurology in SCTIMST. We had again very close association together in Trivandrum, as SCTIMST is situated in Trivandrum Medical College Campus. After she left Trivandrum, she went into private practice for a while.

I met her again in 1995 in New Delhi when she was laid up with a small stroke. Fortunately she recovered fairly Well. Though she did not send her write up, I thought that I could use the material prepared by Prof. Sunil Pandya and Prof. Kalyanaraman. I was indeed happy when I could honour her (in absentia) as one of the Founder members of the Indian Academy of Neurology in 1996. She is still active and has sent a paper for the Hyderabad meeting of the Indian Academy of Neurology' in 1998. She did not however attend the meeting. All of us wish her a healthy, calm, and peaceful life for a long time.

V. Virmani.

President, Neurological Society of India, 1978

The first lady to be honoured as our president neither went to a school nor had a private tutor till she joined a government high school for girls in the 9th standard for a short while. There, on the first day, a biting remark by the Anglo-Indian spinster who was the principal made her resolve never to attend that school again. She thus continued her studies at home under her parents' guidance. A friend introduced her to the Professor of Psychology at the Foreman christian college, Lahore. with his permission she attended lectures and seminars as a casual student, travelling 40-50 miles to and fro each day to do so. She recalls the gas plants that provided power to the public buses of those clays. The burning gases added to the summer heat and breakdowns were frequent. After two years of such study, at the suggestion of the professor she appeared for M. A. in psychology and after some misadventures obtained the degree which, she says, may be "spurious" but was certainly not cheap!

On deciding to pursue medicine as a career she enrolled at the hitherto "males only" Khalsa College in Amritsar. She obtained the requisite certificate. She then applied at the university of Bombay for admission to its medical courses where she faced further. difficulties. Her qualifications were deemed "spurious". Thanks to the intervention of the then Dean of the Grant Medical college. Dr. D. p. sethna she was enrolled and obtained her M. B. s. s. She recalls with nostalgia her student career in the medical college where she and her colleagues had the liberty to knock at the doors of

the various professors at any time and seek any information without hesitation "In those good old days the student-teacher relationship was more meaningful. It was said of our professor of Anatomy that even when he eventually lies in his grave, if a student knocks to ask the origin or insertion of some intrinsic muscle, he will turn over to reply".

Of her postgraduate education she says. "Except for one year's fellowship at the Institute of Neurology and National Hospital for Nervous Diseases. Queen Square, London I do not recall undergoing any further formal training in neurology". She had worked in general medicine at Irwin Hospital, Willingdon Hospital and Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital. Whilst at the Irwin Hospital she first encountered an indifference on the part of the laboratory staff towards clinical problems (an attitude she was to confront again when she joined the All India Institute of Medical Sciences). Liver biopsies sent in by her were inevitably reported as "blood clot". Taking the biopsy personally to the pathologist and showing him the liver tissue too did not help for the technician preferred cutting beautiful sections of blood clots. It was only when she, personally, cleared the tissue from the adherent clots before handing it in, that her problem was solved.

In London she worked with Dr. McDonald Critchley and developed an interest in the mechanisms of speech and their disorders as well as in body image disturbances. From these experiences grew a fascination with the neural basis for the perceptual disturbances of space (including intrapersonal space) and the perception of time. She also came into contact with Drs. Denis Williams, John Marshall and Meadows. On occasion Sir Charles Symonds would drop in to discuss a difficult clinical problem and Dr. Virmani thrilled at his phenomenal memory which permitted a total recall of details in history and clinical findings in patients seen years earlier.

When she returned to India there were no separate neurology or neurosurgery centres in north India. She was the first to start a section of neurology at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research at Chandigarh. Dr. D. R. Gulati had already started the Department of Neurosurgery. When she moved over to the A. I. I. M. S. in Delhi in 1964 she set up the department of neurology there but found that she was spending her entire time in making lists for purchases or comparative statements or dealing with proformas, invoices etc. No clerical help was provided at that stage. She is specially vocal about the demoralising effects of procedural delays and bureaucratic obstructions that are often carried too far by the administration. As she points out, especially where research projects are concerned, by the time one manages to get through the series of administrative blocks, the need for the project may have passed or a deadening effect produced on the enthusiasm of the scientist, killing his interest in the project. Dr. Virmani also laments the lack of a well designed patient referral system. Poor facilities for rapid transport, ineffective dialogue with referring physicians, poor follow up checks and incomplete records pose formidable problems in this regard.

She also urges efforts by all of us to use mass media to educate the public about treatable diseases and available facilities. She also urges continuing education of different categories of medical and paramedical personnel in recent neurological and neurosurgical trends.

Dr. Virmani has been especially interested in the functions of the brain with special reference to cognition. She has also been studying infections of the nervous system, especially atypical tuberculous meningitis. Since she joined the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute she is conscious of the fact that many promising young neuroscientists find the present conditions in most parts of India frustrating and demoralising. In particular, monetary rewards for full time workers are unrealistic and if we are to attract good individuals to our professional ranks we have a lot to attend to.

BIODATA OF DR. VIMLA VIRMANI

Born on 12 April 1919 at Lyallpur.

M. A. (Psychology), M. B. B. S, F.A. M. S, F. R. C. P (Edin).

Lecturer in Neurology P. G. I, Chandigarh, 1963-1964.

Assistant Professor of Neurology AIIMS, New Delhi 1964-1971.

Associate Professor of Neurology, AIIMS, New Delhi 1971-1975.

Professor and Head of the Neurology Department, 1975-1979.

Honorary Visiting Professor Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology and Consultant Neurologist, New Delhi 1979 onwards. Started the section of neurology at Post Graduate Institute, Chandigarh. Started, developed and organised the Department of Neurology at A IIMS, New Delhi.

Now involved in organising the Department of Neurology at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute tbr Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum. Presented about 80 papers in various international congresses, national conferences in the fields of neurology, medicine, paediatrics, psychiatry, and allied sciences.

Participated in Exchange Scientist Programme of National Academy of IVledical Sciences.

Examiner for D. M. (Neurology) and M. N. A. M. S (Neurology).

Published about 70 papers in national and international journals.

TEN IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS OF DR. V. VIRMANI

1. Correlation of electrical activity of brain with metabolic parameters. Part I Isolated cerebral cortex technique as an aid to the kinetic study of cerebral metabolism. Indian Journal of medical Research, 1963.
2. Metabolic changes in coma and precoma states due to hypoxia and hypercapnia, Neurology (India),23, 196, 1965.
3. Cytochemical studies on cells grown in vitro from explants of normal and dystrophic human skeleton, subcutaneous fat and fascia IInd International Congress in Muscle Diseases, Perth Australia, 1971, published in Basic Research in Myology Part I Ed. B. A. Kakula Excerpta Medica, Elsevier.
4. Speech and lan-9ua-9e disturbances in hemiplegics. Indian Journal of Medical Research 61 , I 395, 1 973. (Nair K. R and Virmani. V.)
5. Activation of EEG by hyoscine hyderobromide, Indian Journal of Medical Research, 63, 313, 197 5.
6. Motor neurone disease in young adults in North India, Journal of Association of Physicians of India. 670, 1975. Eds. Mani K. V. Walker AE, Tandon P. N.
7. Preceptual and cognitive disturbances in epileptics with special reference to disturbances of 'Body Schema'. Proceedings of the National Seminar on Epilepsy Bangalore, 1 975.
8. Cerebrospinal fluid study in a typical presentation of tuberculous meningitis, Journal of Neurological Sciences, 26, 56'7 -592, 197 5.
9. Periodic lateralised epileptiform discharges in a case of diffuse cerebral cysticercosis, Journal of Neuro Paediatric, I,196,1977.
10. Capgras phenomenon in a case of temporal lobe epilepsy. Folio psychiatrica et Neurologica. 77 ,31, 1977 .