

Presidential Address delivered by Dr. V.R. Khanolkar on the occasion of the 3rd Annual Conference of the IAMS

I am happy to be amidst you all once again and share my impressions and thoughts on the achievements and the immediate future programmes of the Academy. I am sure you all agree with me in believing that we have successfully overcome the teething troubles inherent in the establishment of a complex organization like an Academy of medical scientists. I see discernible signs of fulfillment of some of our objectives. As you are all aware, the Academy has been established with the over-all aim of promoting the cause of medical science in India and more particularly "*the cultivation of scientific knowledge and its application to human welfare*". Since the latter function is primarily within the province or the agency of the Central or the State Governments, a purely academic body like ours can serve better by offering timely and authoritative scientific advice on matters of national importance. As mentioned in my address in 1963, our first and great task is to establish a climate of science. For many years to come we will be judged by the earnestness and thoroughness with which we set up or promote the highest academic standards in the field of medical sciences in the country. A period of two or three years is too short a time in the life of any organization and more so a body of intellectuals who have got together to adumbrate, discuss and implement new & far-reaching policies for the improvement of scientific standards in the country. Therefore, we need not be unduly exercised by fears and doubts that the progress has not been spectacular. Indeed, if we look at the early history of many of the academies all over the world, the initial progress appears to be rather slow and tardy. Perhaps, it is desirable that a certain amount of intellectual ferment takes place and a stage of "*autoreproductive criticality*" is generated before the organization can take on the several functions entrusted to its care.

It is against this background that we have to judge our experiences during the last three years. I have no doubt that during this understandable '*silent gap*', the Academy has unobtrusively but deliberately helped in the dissemination of the scientific knowledge by organizing special lectures by some of our Fellows and visiting scientific in different centres in the country. It is a matter for further satisfaction that the Academy has not pre-occupied itself with the sedate classical themes but with the much more practical and pressing problems facing the country. It is a good augury that a series of lectures were arranged on Emergency Medicine in the wake of the recent military operations. I trust that in future also we will keep up this spirit of acute awareness of new and unanticipated medical care problems and not be subjected to the usual accusation that academicians tend to sit in their ivory towers.

The Academy has also embarked on its legitimate and conventional functions of disseminating the scientific knowledge through the medium of seminars and workshops. The printed page can no longer be a sufficient medium of communication, particularly, in the context of rapidly expanding frontiers of knowledge. The early history of some of the famous academic bodies of the world like the Royal Society reveals that they acted as the so-called "*Invisible College*" taking care of the '*continuing education*' of academicians while attracting new and latent men of genius. Science can only flourish in this continuous process of shifting and exchange of information of the techniques, the know-how and interpretative skills which form the bedrock of new acquisitions of knowledge.

Recently the Academy has organized a seminar on cirrhosis of the Liver at the S.N. Medical College, Agra. It is singularly fortunate that the first seminar was devoted to a study of liver in which several of our scientific workers have made notable contributions during the last 15 years. As one closely associated with the Liver Diseases Study Group of the Indian Council of Medical Research from its inception and having followed personally the evolution of many of the investigations which were discussed at Agra, I can imagine the impact of such seminars. I am glad to learn that the Academy has thought it fit to garner the large amount of information that has been collected by our own workers, so that it will act as a stimulus for further scientific explorations.

Similarly, I must felicitate the organizers of the proposed workshop on Bone Diseases for having chosen a subject, which has, so far, not received adequate attention at the hands of our workers

during the last several years. I am confident that this type of activity will, in turn, provide further incentives for rapid exchange of information in certain areas, which have not been developed in the country for want of suitably trained specialists. It is only in this manner that the rich and varied clinic-pathological material can be exploited not only for the immediate benefit of the scientists but also towards the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of teaching and research. I hope in future the Academy will be equally successful in attracting people of the caliber and experience of Dr. Putschar in many other fields and help in transmitting the knowledge and wisdom to successive batches of promising young workers in the country.

Following Independence, it was a historical necessity that many of our young and enterprising scientists had to go abroad and "*drink deep from the wells of scientific thought*" in foreign laboratories. But the past experience also shows that not all people, who, having received specialized training abroad, have returned to their base camps. Many of those who returned were denied the opportunities to pursue their special fields of interest. Several factors, particularly the absence of teams capable of absorbing their talents have led to frustration and inability to put into practice their special skills. If this from of brain drain, peculiar to our country is to be arrested who have to explore other avenues of group-training of people committed to the specialties in medical sciences. I am very hopeful that the training of a group of orthopedic surgeons, radiologists and pathologists from selected institutions will be more rewarding. We can ill-afford to send abroad large numbers of people for training in each specialty. Instead, the new experiment of inviting eminent scientists to share their experience with a much larger number of active workers in our country will pay rich dividends in the long run. The Academy has undoubtedly a vital role to play promoting a new climate of science. While conferences and seminars are the order of the day, I wish to utter a word of caution. I trust the Academy will always strive to maintain certain standards of excellence. It must shun the relatively more popular role of merely playing host. Instead, it should function as a scientific forum for the exchange of information on problems associated with the application of such knowledge for the benefit of the sick.

During the last three decades I have had the unique privilege of witnessing the sprouting of the tender sapling of medical research in this country and even the fruition of some of the endeavours of our scientists. I feel that it is necessary to establish sound traditions of scientific research. Our greatest need is to provide for the physical and intellectual basis for the continuous exchange of information and for the training of workers in the principles of investigative work. To cater to the needs of different disciplines of medical and biological sciences is by no means easy. The Academy has an important role in organizing periodical short-term courses or workshop or seminars. I trust that these seminars and or workshop will in due course serve the needs of a larger number of teams drawn from the remote institutions in the country, so that they can apply the knowledge in their day-to-day work. In these efforts to lift ourselves by the bootstrap such seminars should be held in different parts of the country. By such steps the true foundations for the promotion of medical sciences on a country-wide basis will be laid.

I should now like to touch briefly upon another important matter which is exercising our minds during the last two or three years. As you are aware, the Ministry of Health sounded the Academy to find out if the Academy would be in a position to undertake the task of conducting national examinations in order to secure a uniform standard of efficiency in major medical disciplines. It was believed that such a step would obviate the necessity of our students proceeding abroad in large numbers, no doubt attracted primarily by the glamour of foreign qualifications. While it is most desirable that there should be continuous international contacts and exchange of views and results of research, it would be generally agreed that the continuous migration and drift of our promising scientists in quest of foreign degrees and diplomas should be curbed. It was, therefore, intended that those persons who have completed the necessary terms of post-graduate study and acquired reasonable skills and proficiency in the theoretical and practical aspects of any major discipline should be permitted to appear at such national examinations. It was contemplated that while doing so the nature role of the universities in

the matter of conducting post-graduate examinations should not be disturbed and that an acceptable form of national examinations could be evolved to meet the needs of a pressing situation.

I would like to emphasize that in some countries national examinations of this nature do not supplant the role of the universities in the matter of post-graduate education and the awarding of post-graduate degrees. This is particularly true in the case of clinical subjects.

I would now like to refer to another major policy decision the Council of the Academy has taken recently, namely, the institution of the examinations as one of the criteria of admission of medical scientists to the membership of Academy. The basic idea behind such a proposal is to secure a uniformity of standards on which persons admitted to the membership of the Academy. For this purpose the Academy should make a critical analysis of the different faces of post-graduate examinations currently in progress in India and introduce reforms in the examination system such as the use of multiple choice questions. Let me say at this stage that the awarding of a degree is but a terminal event in a whole series of procedure son part of the teacher and the taught. If properly conducted the system of the examination method itself could exert an important influence on the quality of our training programems and would eventually serve to fulfill the basic objectives of the Academy itself, namely, all-round improvement in post-graduate education throughout the country. The success of this venture would depend upon the extent to which we are able to carry with us the medical faculties of the universities.

All methods are good and acceptable as long as they are not dogmatically prescribed and serve as tools in the hands of experienced teachers. It is my wish that the membership conferred by the Indian Academy of Medical Sciences should confer on the prospective recipients not only the stamps of excellence but should carry with it an unwritten area of good training for creative work, scholarship and promise of scientific leadership.