

**Address delivered by Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India at the 6th Convocation of the
INDIAN ACADEMY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, held in the Maulana Azad Medical College
on the 6th December, 1968**

Fellows and members of the academy, distinguished guests.

I am glad to have this opportunity of meeting such a large and distinguished gathering of Medical Scientists. This Academy is a relatively young one. I hope that the foundations on which it is being built are rooted in the realities of our country. This is essential, if it is not to become just one more sector one more vested interest. Other nations have found great advantage in having a strong and widely representative national academy of Sciences. It is a pity that in our country, we lack such a body and that the scientific community is fragmented between rival bodies often following parallel courses. An academy such as this one should be able to do a great deal, to maintain and to raise the standards of the medical profession and also to give direction and purpose to the activities of members aspiring to the distinction of joining your ranks. An Indian Academy of Medical Sciences can also help in advising the Government and in taking over some of the responsibilities which are otherwise left to the Government or to some other semi-official agencies. One of our post independence problems is the attitude that everything can and should be left to the Government. This is not only wrong but dangerous. It is an attitude of dependence, not one of self-help. Such attitudes must be combated in all walks of life. I do not by this mean, that you should not be further helped in your needs but you have yourself been conscious of the difficulties which the Government also faces at the moment. Every profession is inevitably concerned with its own specific problems, yet it has to operate in the concrete circumstances of our times. We cannot escape basic realities. We are a poor country. We are on the threshold of an industrial, agricultural and social transformation of our entire society. If we fail to take these into account our scientists, technologists, medical men and others will become merely protagonists of their own particular interest, and how can a particular interest be advanced if a country as a whole does not progress. I hope that the Indian Academy of Medical Sciences will set an example of commitment as much to the maintenance of the highest standards of your great and noble profession as a commitment to the down trodden, the oppressed and the dispossessed who constitute the vast majority of our kind. Without this twin commitment we cannot progress. Medical science like the biological and biochemical sciences in general has made miraculous advances in the last few years. We are now groping towards the understanding of the inner-most secrets of life, of human rejuvenation through transplants and other means. Much of this advance has been made at the frontiers of individual disciplines but in all activities scientific, economic and administrative the need for the interdisciplinary approach is now being felt increasingly. Along with it, the Government is becoming increasingly complex. This calls for specialization and expertise. Yet unless all these many areas of specialization and expertise are adopted and coordinated, efficiency is affected and tends to achieve less than the whole. While it is very important for us to keep pace with the advances of medical knowledge in the rest of the world, our basic medical problems still remain elementary. There are some five hundred and 60 thousand villages in India. How many of them have not got a doctor? Some mass campaigns such as the Malaria Eradication campaigns and BCG campaign have covered large areas and wide segments of the population. But can the same be said about the ordinary simple medical aid for all those who suffer from the more common diseases. Here the problem is not so much, that of medical science as perhaps of medical organization, resources and the availability of requisite personnel. Our urban medical facilities are still inadequate. Even so, they are far better than our rural medical services where they exist at all. It is not easy to get doctors, engineers and other trained personnel to live and work in the villages or in the mountains, where they are most needed. This is the problem which we must attack from many directions. An obvious remedy is to make our villages more liveable. This is happening now but very-very slowly with the opening up of communications, with the extension of rural electrification, the availability of cheaper radios and so on. But much more has to be done. Another alternative would be some kind of professional conscription which one or two of our states have tried on a rather limited scale. Can we not find the third way between evolution and compulsion? Perhaps an Academy such as this could help to create the social climate in which young people and young scientists are attracted to service

in difficult conditions, even for limited tenures, out of a sense of idealism, service and social consciousness. Even in our urban areas there is scope for greater initiative in the establishment of private or co-operative contributory health services or health assurance schemes. Panels of doctors could take up such activities in certain urban districts. Such work should also attract social recognition. Other vast yet elementary problems which must be tackled are those of the water supply, environmental sanitation and hygiene. We are now fully aware of growth of our population. The contours of the National Family Planning programme have been drawn, but in terms of organization, training and education the task is a tremendous and an urgent one. Every doctor, nurse, para-medical person has to be mobilized. The Family Planning drive is inter connected with maternal and child health and is concerned not only with limitation of numbers, but with quality as well. We must be equally concerned about quality. Nutrition is a problem of great social and economic significance as it has intimate bearing on the physical and intellectual quality of our people. In many ways Nutrition and Family Planning are complimentary programmes. The target population is the same to a large extent. The organization and personnel needed for dealing with these twin problems in the long run over-lap. Thus there may be considerable advantage, particularly, in the long run, in a joint approach to these two questions. I am told that nutrition does not figure adequately in the present medical syllabus. If this is true it should be corrected. This is not an unimportant subject since part of the problem of mal-nutrition is that of ignorance and superstition. Amongst our people there is little knowledge about the right food or its nutritional value for an average person, the invalid or the child. Old beliefs regarding particular items and their beneficial or harmful effects are widespread. Such information should be part of general education as well as of medical education. So should be the problems of sanitation which is the very foundation of the health of the individual and of society. Many of us tend to live within, live and work within our own groove but as I pointed out earlier, all these different lines or roads cross one another and it is only when we can take an interest in what is happening around us that we can be truly proficient in our own work also. We have in India a wealth of ancient knowledge. What have we done to find out how much of this medical knowledge is valid and worthwhile in the light of modern medicine? Let us not be mere imitators. Our need is great enough for us to look into all aspects which would be useful to bring better health to the country.

I should like to give my good wishes to the Fellows and Members and specially to those who are new comers to this Academy. You face a great challenge, but I believe that the greater the challenge the greater are the resources which the human being can develop within himself to face that challenge and I hope, therefore, that this academy and other medical institutions which we have in this country will be able to tackle our problems with determination and will be able to be interested enough in the country and its development to give of their best to achieve that transformation of our society which is the ideal and objective for which we live and we work. My good wishes to this academy.