

**Address by Shri B. Shankaranand, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare on the occasion of 20<sup>th</sup> Convocation of NAMS on March 24, 1982**

I am honoured today to be the Chief Guest at the 20th Convocation of the National Academy of Medical Sciences. This Academy could not have been born under better auspices as it was launched in 1961 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the first Convocation of the Academy was presided over by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Both of them had enjoined upon the Academy that it should strive for the maintenance of the most rigorous and highest academic standards. A great deal of consultation took place with the Central Government, the Universities, the Central Council of Health and Medical Profession before the Academy was established. I notice that successive convocations of the Academy were addressed by some of our country's most eminent persons and our beloved Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, is an Honorary Fellow of the Academy. It is indeed a privilege to address this Convocation.

The Academy is unquestionably a very prestigious body comprising as it does of some of the finest talent in medical sciences in the country. Over the years, the Academy has made considerable progress. While we have a large number of professional and specialist associations in the various branches of medical and health sciences, I believe that the National Academy of Medical Sciences is a unique forum for a trans-disciplinary synthesis of all the medical specialties as a single nodal point. This in my opinion is the uniqueness of National Academy of Medical Sciences as well as its greatest strength.

The basic objective behind all pursuit of the sciences, medical or of any other kind of scientific knowledge, is the improvement of the quality of life. The aim is not merely to attract attention on the problems of the affluent and educated sectors of the society but to meet the needs of the common man residing in the remotest geographical periphery. Unless this goal is achieved, science and technology, which are making rapid advancement the world over, would serve very limited purpose indeed. It should, therefore, be our most fundamental objectives to see that all available knowledge and expertise are ploughed into application by translating them into simple, easily applicable devices which can be put to use by the medical health functionaries in the obtaining field conditions, away from the set-up of the larger hospitals and specialized centres, on the least cost basis. I would like to reiterate that unless the latest know-how and technology are effectively put to use for prevention, diagnosis and cure there would be a very poor argument in support of the existing large scale investments on medical education and research.

I am, of the considered opinion that this Academy, representing the most eminent medical personalities in the country, can play an extremely useful role in assisting the Government not only in the effective delivery of health care services but also through the dissemination of knowledge to all operational levels to help in the prevention and control of widespread and commonly prevalent communicable and other diseases. For this purpose it would be necessary for those who manage the affairs of this Academy to take a conscious decision to get intimately involved with the problems of health care confronting the nation.

I would like to make reference to another problem with which we have been grappling for the past sometime. This relates to the basic approach to and the very contents of the existing medical educational system, specially at the graduate and postgraduate level. Happily, our medical scientists and teachers are now agreed that the existing curricular content of medical education, while it may have served its purpose in the past, is growingly getting out of tune with the present day and future health problems of the country. If we carefully examine the widening gap between the existing health services structure and the kind of care actually required to be provided to the teeming population of our country, it would be appreciated that we cannot any further delay the kind of decisions that are required to reorient the educational system and to proceed to produce the kind of

medical professionals who are required to serve the actual health needs of the country.

This is a very large and important objective and I would expect the Academy to collaborate with the Government in bringing about the kind of changes that can no longer wait if we are to meaningfully proceed in the direction of providing universal primary health care service to all our people, fully backed by general specialties and super-specialties, within a well-organized referral system.

The Academy can also render very valuable help in undertaking operational studies in the existing health delivery system and identifying the means through which the services can be made more efficient and cost effective. Towards this end, in my opinion, no fundamental research is required. Instead, in its various meetings and get-togethers, symposia, seminars, workshops, etc., the Academy can elicit the reactions of the researchers, teachers and practitioners on identified problems, analyze the real difficulties and reactions of those actually involved in the effort and arriving at a pragmatic approach through which the existing bottlenecks and deficiencies can be resolved.

In the context of these problems the Government has already established the Medical Education Review Committee, representing various fields of functioning and interests. This Committee has already done some valuable work and we are hoping that it would submit its report within another 3 months or so, at least in regard to the more pressing and urgent issues.

For the past nearly seven years, the Academy has given valuable assistance to the Government in running the affairs of the National Board of Examinations. In 1975 it had been rightly decided that the National Board of Examinations should be established as an independent entity, being fully responsible to conduct the prestigious post-graduate examinations to obviate the necessity of our doctors having to go to various foreign countries to acquire higher qualifications as well as to afford an opportunity to all those in the field to seek to secure the hallmark of excellence by qualifying in the examination conducted by the Board. The examinations conducted by the National Board of Examinations have become popular and over a thousand candidates annually appear at the Primary Examination.

The National Board of Examination has now been established as an independent body, as a registered society. Needless to say this development does not bring about any revolutionary change in the situation except that the Board has been created as a separate, legal entity with vial linkages with the National Academy of Medical Sciences, the Medical Council of India, the Indian Council of Medical Research, the Directorate General of Armed Forces Medical Services, the Indian Medical Association and other professional bodies. While placing on record my appreciation of the services rendered by the Academy during the period that it looked after the affairs of the National Board of Examinations, I am confident that, henceforth, the linkages between these two prestigious bodies would become even more meaningful and the Academy would continue to render all possible help to further raise the standing of the examinations conducted by the National Board.

I find that consequent to the initial period during which the government afforded requisite assistance to the Academy, there was a fairly long period during which the Academy was generally expected to function on its own. Under my directions, a new Plan scheme has been formulated to render suitable assistance to the Academy not only for undertaking and completing the construction of its own building, for which we have made a suitable piece of land available in the campus of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, but to also assist the Academy in extending its existing activities to run a variety of courses for the continuing education of medical professionals, at various levels of functioning.

I congratulate all those who have been today admitted to the fraternity of medical scientists in the National Academy. The country looks to them and to all others already in the fold to take on and successfully discharge the responsibility and challenges which confront the country. I also take this

opportunity of wishing the new entrants to the Academy the highest success in their various efforts, whether they relate to teaching, research or delivery of services.

I have greatly enjoyed being associated with this function and I would like to thank the Academy once again for inviting me to be here.