

**The Text of Presidential Address by Dr. K.K. Talwar, President, NAMS at the Convocation held on
30th October, 2010 at Government Medical College, Patiala**

Honourable Chief Guest, Your Excellency, the Governor of Punjab, Guest of Honour, Prof. J.S. Bajaj, Chairman, Organising Committee, Prof. Ajmer Singh, Organising Secretary, Dr. Surinder Singh, Colleagues, Newly Elected Fellows and Members, Friends:

I welcome you all to Patiala, the erstwhile princely state, now a district headquarters, famous for 'pagri', 'parandee', and 'jutti', a centre of education, fashion and a city of refined sensibilities. We are very happy that the Annual Conference of the National Academy of Medical Sciences is being held at Patiala, the alma mater of many fellows including me. I really feel proud to be here today. The training at this Institute gave me the foundation to grow in the profession. I salute this great Institute.

Your Excellency, Sir, we are indeed grateful to you for having spared time from your busy schedule to be the Chief Guest and grace our convocation. You are a veteran leader and institution builder. In your many decades of public service, having headed many important ministries i.e. Defence, Ministry of Science and Technology, Atomic Energy and Home Affairs, you have set standards that our Fellows would truly profit by emulating. We thank you for being among us today, to offer support and motivation to all of us.

The importance of science in modern life was stressed by none other than our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru who said, "It is science alone that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening of custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, or a rich country inhabited by starving poor... Who indeed could afford to ignore science today? At every turn we have to seek its aid... The future belongs to science and those who make friends with science." Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the National Academy of Medical Sciences, was inaugurated by Nehruji in 1961 with a mandate to recognize and foster talented medical and biomedical scientists in India.

The first convocation was held in 1963 and on that occasion the then President of India Dr. S. Radha Krishnan said, and I quote, "I hope this Medical Academy which represents different sciences with men of achievements in their respective spheres which offers incentives to men of promise that they can also get their distinctions will be regarded as something to which all our youngsters will look forward to".

Over the years, the Academy has made consistent efforts for fulfilling its mission and objectives. The Academy, today, has over 800 Fellows and 1600 members. It has been taking various steps to nurture, promote and encourage scientific talent in the country, including through orations, awards and commendations. In today's convocation the newly elected Fellows and Members have received their scrolls. I congratulate all of them for their achievement in their professional careers.

For the past few years the Academy has been trying to optimize the utilization of IT enabled services to increase the outreach of educational programmes. The NAMS-PGI Telemedicine Centre has utilized tele-linkages so that faculty and students from Medical Colleges in Shimla, Rohtak, Patiala and Amritsar participate in symposium/CMEs being organized in PGI, Chandigarh.

The Academy provides facilitates for junior and middle level specialists to acquire new skills and learn new techniques at chosen Centres of Excellence. The Academy has also adopted programmes and funds travel expenses to Emeritus Fellows to visit various medical colleges to strengthen and contribute to their teaching and training programmes. Under the leadership of Prof. Bajaj the Academy is also planning to call a session including the Vice-Chancellor of University of Health Sciences, in order to evolve a wholistic and comprehensive strategy for improving the quality of medical education in the large number of medical colleges in the country. We are committed to making a positive and substantial contribution to the cause of promoting excellence in the field of medical education in India.

The importance of medical profession and medical education in the society cannot be overemphasized. In his speech to the US Congress made far back in 1949, Pt. Nehru said that

education and health are of utmost importance if we have to eradicate poverty. This was the main reason he laid so much significance on building national institutions of eminence, which he used to call “temples of learning”. Our Hon’ble Prime Minister, while recently delivering the convocation address in a medical institute, emphasized that human knowledge is growing at an unprecedented pace and if our institutes have to keep pace, we have to be at the frontiers of higher education and specifically, medical education.

Medical Education has been our strength in the past as many of our colleagues trained in India are doing exceptionally well all over the world. However, unfortunately, over the last some years, standards of medical education have been on the steady decline. The government medical colleges are mostly starved of funds and deprived of talent. Sadly, private colleges often have commercial agendas and this is also a fall-out of proliferation in the number of medical colleges in the last decade compounded by the lack of qualified and committed faculty to guide and mentor students.

The established regulatory system has failed to deliver and could not monitor and take care of standards. The commercialization of education, coupled with lack of growth opportunities has even affected the attractiveness of this profession. Now it is no longer a profession of choice among young bright aspirants. More and more mediocre students are joining medicine, which is not healthy for this noble profession. Society can ill afford to put its health into the hands of mediocre medical professionals. The profession needs talented, bright and highly motivated young students, who are willing to dedicate themselves to the profession and give their best to their patients. These youngsters would become pioneers in research and tomorrow’s leaders in medicine.

Another major issue of concern is the decline in ethical standards. The commercialization of medicine has eroded the confidence of society and our profession is losing its image of nobility. Here, I am reminded of what George Bernard Shaw once said about our profession-“We have transferred our faith from God to the medical profession”. Such perception was even greater in our country where people considered doctors next to God. The profession can ill afford this terrible decline and it is for doctors to mount individual and institutional efforts to arrest and reverse this trend. This profession needs dedication and sacrifice.

Several solutions have been highlighted by various committees consisting of eminent leaders in medicine. But the biggest challenge for us is to initiate implementation of these solutions in a pragmatic, time-bound and efficient manner. We all have to take up this challenge individually and also collectively. The Academy is committed to contribute to this end, by interacting with the government and other regulatory bodies to contain this malady.

We all need to work to revive the nobility and glory of this profession and to heal the soul of medicine. I need to remind you what Harry Truman said – “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit”.

I am grateful to the organizers for having worked tirelessly to make this conference a truly memorable one.

Once again, your excellency, my grateful thanks for your involvement and support.

Thank you.