

The Text of the address by the President Dr. K.K. Talwar, delivered at the Annual Convocation on 15th October 2011, at Bhubaneswar (Odisha) – 51st Annual Conference

Hon'ble Chief Guest, your Excellency the Governor of Odisha, Chairman Organising Committee, Dr. R.C. Mohanti, Organising Secretary, Prof. S. Mohanty - fellow colleagues, distinguished Guests and Friends, I welcome you all to the annual meeting of NAMS.

Your Excellency Sir, we are indeed grateful to you for sparing your valuable time to grace this occasion. As a distinguished and veteran legal luminary of the country you have been a champion for the causes of the common man. In January 1959 the Central Council of Health Government considered a proposal from the Government of Andhra Pradesh. After extensive process of consultation and deliberation and with the effort of medical doyens of the time Indian Academy of Medical Sciences was initiated and registered.

The Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lai Nehru formally inaugurated the Academy in the Sapru House on the 19th December, 1961. He was pleased to accept the Honorary Fellowship of the Academy. Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister said that he hoped the Academy would lay stress on the pursuit of research work and simultaneously ensure that high standards were maintained. Research, he said was an inseparable part of any systematic pursuit of knowledge and, therefore, it was imperative that the quality should be "absolutely first class". He added that while he had accepted the Honorary Fellowship of the Academy with a sense of gratitude, it remained an honour only as long as it was restricted to a select group. It has been the endeavour of the academy to keep the excellence in our standards as the primary goal. I congratulate all the newly elected Fellows/ Members for their achievement/ recognition who have received the scrolls today and wish more laurels in their future academic journey.

In his address at the inauguration ceremony of the Academy, Col. Sangam Lal mentioned that the Academy has been formed with the basic objectives of promotion of knowledge in the field of medicine and allied disciplines, and promotion of its application to the problems of national welfare. The establishment of the Academy will serve as incentive to medical scientists of this country to seek recognition of their work and to stimulate them to pursue research of the highest order.

The Academy has been focusing on bringing together the leading scientists working at the frontier of biomedical science, education and research. Most of the academies enjoy a particular state in their countries and even outside. The academies, because of their knowledge group, can play an active role in public policy and education. These initiatives will help the scientists and the society. Evidence generated by medical research provides data for effective policy.

As per the mandate, the NAMS has an important role to serve the cause of medical education and health. Today, in our country, medical education and profession are facing serious challenges, and are at cross road. The standard of medical colleges is declining. As a national policy we need more doctors; patients:doctors ratio at present is 1:1700 where as the expected should be 1:1000. To meet the demand for more doctors more and more medical colleges are being opened. Because of the heavy cost involved, the state Governments are not able to start new colleges and most of the colleges are coming in the private sector. Unfortunately the standard of the medical college is declining – the Government colleges are starved of funds and the private sector mostly has commercial interest in mind with no real commitment to promote good medical education. Research is dwindling; Teachers are no more role models for their students. The Academy can play an important role i) to identify the various reasons for this decline in standard of medical education and medical practice and ii) provide innovative remedial solutions to the Government.

The society can ill afford to be treated by substandard doctors. Prof. William Osler once said that – "It is astonishing with how little reading a doctor can practice medicine, but it is not astonishing how badly he may do it". We all need to work to ensure to maintain the standards of medical education and health services to the society in general.

To promote education and research activities, the Academy has been trying to play its part - i.e. funding extramural CME and even organizing intramural CME on areas of national importance. The Academy is publishing the journal with research articles/ reviews. Emeritus Fellows are funded to visit medical colleges strengthen the educational and research activities of colleges. We need to go further - to consider adopting one college in each region and help to strengthen the training and research programme. The regional chapters needs to be more active. We need to work to revive the standard and glory of the noble profession. The Academy should take up this timely challenge.

The other aspect I wish to highlight is how promptly commerce has crept into the sanctum sanctorium of this profession i.e. of commercialization of medicine. It is a noble profession and demands a commitment from all professional, to follow the Hippocratic oath. The society is loosing confidence and respect for medical profession. This has also resulted in increased medical litigation, another serious threat to the prestige of this profession. This is altering the practice of medicine. Sometimes unnecessary investigations are done as a safe ground for prevention of litigation. All this increases the cost of the medical treatment. Sometimes the patient/family adopts this approach to pressurize the doctors to extract financial compensation. No medical professional can assure a cure or surgical success all the time. Sir, similarly no lawyer can assure success of the case to the client under all circumstances. A doctor is not Semi God. A doctor is supposed to work with spirit of dedication, sacrifice, sympathy and humility.

To err is human and there is no physician on earth, who has not made mistakes. Medicine is a science of probability the public needs to be educated to revive this confidence and avoid unnecessary litigation. The Academy should play an active role, in formulating guidelines and suggesting measures to prevent unethical practices of some of our professional colleagues and also prevent unnecessary litigation/harassment to genuine professionals. Of course, those who do unethical practices should be punished.

The country is facing many challenges particularly related to the health from climate change, stem cell research, life style related diseases and new emerging diseases. The challenges are getting global and don't respect the anatomical/political boundaries. Thus our Academy should even foster active participation with other science academies.

I thank the Organizers for making such a wonderful scientific programme and arrangement. Once again, your Excellency, my grateful thanks for your involvement and we look forward to your words of wisdom.

Thank you.