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Dr. Anant Puranik

Dr. Anant Puranik: Sensitive, caring and generous to a fault

There are types and types of men, but Dr. Anant Puranik was something unique even as a young medical student, his contemporaries realised that this man was different, quiet, self-effacing and modest to a fault. He showed character and resolution on matters of principle; he was intelligent and hard-working, but never demonstrative or flamboyant. There was also the no nonsense side of him, when Dr. Udayan H. Vyas joined him as a resident in 1968 I am told that he welcomed him with the words 'Dr. Vyas put your degree and your medal in your pocket, roll up your sleeves and start working'. His plastic surgery career spanned what in those days was the Bombay Presidency. He was born in the Haveri District, now in the state of Karnataka and had a distinguished pre-medical career. He graduated in medicine in 1955 from the Bombay University with distinction in forensic and preventive medicine. He had his master's degree in surgery in 1961. With the opening of the Department of Plastic Surgery at the K.E.M. Hospital he became its first senior resident and was inducted into the art and science of plastic surgery - it was the pre-M.Ch. era. Dr. K.S. Goleria recalls "we were a wonderful team and he played a significant role, in building up the academic and the organisational set-up of the department."

Mr. Eric Peet visited K. E. M. Hospital and G S Medical College, Mumbai in 1961 and initiated him into plastic surgery. Dr. Charles Pinto was heading the unit. Mr. Eric Peet helped Dr. Charles Pinto set up the plastic surgical department at the K.E.M Hospital and G.S Medical College in Bombay in 1961. Dr. Puranik fondly recalled that Mr. Peet was very particular about writing post-operative

notes. Once when he failed to do so Mr. Peet asked him in mock-anger 'Puranik if you meet with a road accident and die, from whom can I get the details of the operation?'

Dr. Charles Pinto had an eye for good men and he earmarked Puranik for future success and nurtured and sheltered him in his early formative years. Puranik learnt his craft from this versatile surgeon who could work in the three body cavities with equal dexterity and skill. However above all Puranik imbedded from his master a code of ethics, intellectual honesty and a reverence for suffering humanity that made him the surgeon and teacher that he became in later years.

Puranik was open to progress, but he was conservative and was reluctant to give up well-trying and time tested methods of treatment and when teased or reproached he would smile in his inimitable way and say 'I am a person of the bullock cart days. If there was any pride in the man it was for his Alma Mater the G.S. Medical College and the K.E.M. Hospital and in the achievement of his friends of those days.

After Bombay it was the turn of Ahmedabad. He joined as an assistant professor of plastic surgery in the B. J. Medical College, Ahmedabad in 1964, the dept. was then headed by Prof. Dr. J. R. Jaju. He again contributed handsomely and unassumingly to the establishment and growth of that department. In 1970, he became the head of that department and his contributions are still remembered by all who worked with him. Dr. Udayan Vyas, the then assistant professor fondly recalled his qualities of head and heart, which Anant Puranik possessed in abundant measure. His relationship with his patients was characterised by empathy and enriched by his fluency in Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada. If he could he made it a point to talk to his patients in their own language and they loved him for this. After his stint at Ahmedabad, his centre of activity shifted to Miraj and its surrounding areas. In Miraj, he started his career with Dr. D K Gosavi (Past National President of the

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Association of Otolaryngology Society of India) and did a lot of reconstructions in head and neck surgery. He used to visit smaller places to give plastic surgical help. As the nursing facilities were not up to the mark he trained his wife Usha to assist him. Apart from private practice, he continued to be associated in academic activity and the service of deprived sections of the community. He was a professor at the Sanjeevani Medical Foundation ENT, Post-graduate Institute, Miraj and Prof. of Surgery at D. Y. Patil Medical College, Kolhapur. He served the Shri Siddhi Vinayak Ganpati Cancer Hospital, Miraj both as a plastic surgeon and member of its managing committee and governing council. He donated all his income from this institute to help the poor. One Sunday every month, he would visit the Chaitanya Upasana Trust Hospital, Gundavale, to treat the poor from the surrounding areas free of charge and would pay back to the trust even the transport allowance that was offered to him.

Dr. J. J. Kashalikar, a close associate during this phase of his life was deeply touched by his concern for the poor. He helped many students for schooling by paying their fees and donating books and notebooks. A student all his life, he did not hesitate to learn from his juniors.

A close friend of his early days says this of him 'it would be difficult to find a man like Puranik. I have never heard him say a critical or harsh word about anybody. If he did not approve of a person or his actions he would freeze into silence and that was Purnaik's eloquence. He was a good and versatile plastic surgeon of the old school. Sensitive, caring and generous to a fault. At conferences

I would look out for him and find him and then we would sit together and share our memories of Charles Pinto who moulded both our lives. I still look around at conferences momentarily forgetting that he is no more."

He served as a member of the executive committee of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India. It was in recognition of his contribution to plastic surgery, that he was persuaded to accept the President-ship of the Maharashtra chapter of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India in 2001. He was instrumental to start the Deccan Society of Plastic Surgeons, which included plastic surgeons from 5 districts, Sangli-Miraj, Kolhapur, Satara, Solapur and Belgaum. He was president of Deccan Surgical Society and IMA Miraj branch.

Dr. Puranik is survived by his wife Usha, three lovely daughters Suman, Rama and Swati. The fragrance of his memory will continue to linger in the minds of those, whose lives he touched by his gentle hands.

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