



Remembering Dr. Subhendu Dhar: the altruist in the auto

Abstract

The tragic demise of Dr. Subhendu Dhar, a pioneering figure in the sphere of psychiatry in the Barak Valley of Southern Assam, was lamented at a solemn condolence meeting held at Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) in which several speakers highlighted the remarkable contributions of the departed. Dr. Kamal Nath, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, SMCH in a moving remembrance speech recounted his long and fruitful association with the late Dr. Dhar. As the mental health community at large comes to terms with the void left behind by the passing of the towering stalwart, his life and his example will remain a source of inspiration for the generations to come.

Keywords: Commitment. Mental Health. Trust.

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On a poignant February morning, members of the Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) fraternity gathered in the Council Room of the Administrative Building, SMCH, to look back on the life and works of one of the most illustrious names in the dramatis personae of this institution's glorious history- Dr. Subhendu Dhar, Professor and Head (Retired), Department of Psychiatry, who left for his heavenly abode on the 31st of January, 2017 after a protracted tryst with chronic illness. Dr. (Mrs.) S.R. Barman, Principal-cum-Chief Superintendent, SMCH, chaired the Condolence Meeting and reminisced her intimate association with the late Dr. Dhar as her teacher, and saluted his utmost commitment towards his patients. She recounted Dr. Dhar's contribution as an outstanding leader who was loved and respected by all of his students and patients alike.

Dr. Kamal Nath, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, delivered a brilliant remembrance speech that was studded with anecdotes and insights from a truly remarkable collaboration between the two resounding voices advocating mental health. Dr. Nath began by marveling at the humility and the lack of vanity that were the hallmarks of the towering Dr. Dhar's life. He would certainly find a place in the history books for having started off with a foreign car at the start of his career and signing off in an unceremonious autorickshaw. This was an illustration of the selfless life that he led, in spite of having an outstanding professional career- his affable nature and compassionate forbearance remaining a constant and undying feature of his life. It was in 1995 that Dr. Nath joined as Registrar- an energetic beginner in his early 30s. One can only imagine what sparks might have emanated when two bright minds- albeit from two generations- interacted; and the chemistry was always going to be special between

the Grand Master and the Rising Star. Dr. Dhar was very punctual and would invariably reach the Department by 8:30 in the morning. Around noon, senior faculty members from Medicine, Radiology, and Chest and Tuberculosis (TB) would assemble to discuss matters- both trivial and pressing- with Dr. Dhar. Dr. Nath would be in attendance, often without his wholehearted approval. In his own words, he was "the youngest member of the club". On his way back, the Professor would make sure that Dr. Nath was by his side as he would visit the houses of other senior faculty members- mostly to the chagrin of the newcomer. Dr. Nath was in awe of the Professor and bewitched by his strong relationships with so many prominent figures of that time. It was Dr. Dhar's foreign car that was to come to the rescue every time a Medical Council of India (MCI) Inspector or an External Examiner came to SMCH. He never asked anything for himself, he was a lion-hearted giver who always put the interests of others ahead of his personal needs. The then Member of Parliament (MP) of Silchar Constituency would leave a few blank pages of his official letterhead with Dr. Dhar, knowing and trusting the magnanimity that was integral to his nature.

The mid-90s were a gloomy period in the history of Assam with inadequacies plaguing the Government machinery. Nurses would turn wedding invitations into writing sheets for patients' files during morning rounds, for want of necessary consumables and stationery. Despite this dreary background, Dr. Dhar would spend generously, from his own resources, by recruiting workmen to repair the Hospital beds, which were in a deplorable condition. He made a generous contribution of sixty thousand rupees to enable the smooth functioning of the government vehicle issued under the District Development Committee (DDC) Scheme. Despite financial

constraints, Dr. Dhar would always purchase products of the highest quality for the Department- he never compromised on quality.

On the day of his retirement, Dr. Dhar was happy that the Post Graduate seats in the Department had been approved towards the fag end of his illustrious tenure- however he would not be around to witness the momentous occasion. That was the shining light of his career and that was going to be his lasting legacy. In a formal farewell meeting, the baton of the Department was passed onto Dr. Nath to carry forward the dreams that the Professor had nurtured for the Department.

Dr. Nath concluded by saying that, it was his long-cherished desire to felicitate his respected Professor in a befitting way. He grabbed the opportunity with both hands at the 26th Annual State Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) held at Silchar in September, 2016,[1] where Dr. Dhar was paid rich tributes in the presence of luminaries

from across the nation. Perhaps the most compelling observation on Dr. Dhar was made by the internationally acclaimed psychiatrist Dr. E. Mohandas, who had this to say to Dr. Nath- “Dr. Dhar is a special personality. He appeared frail on his way up to the stage but I got an inkling about his pedigree the moment he started speaking. He spoke like a true champion”.

Reference

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