Obituary

Lieutenant General (Retd) Anand Mohan Ahuja, AVSM, FRCS
(1 November 1923–19 February 2015)

A pioneering cardiothoracic surgeon of the Indian Armed Forces Medical Services, Lieutenant General Anand Mohan Ahuja passed away peacefully at the age of 91 years in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

General Ahuja was born at Lyallpur in the Punjab of undivided India. His father, Dr Jivan Das Ahuja was a well-known physician in the town and encouraged his five sons to become doctors. Anand, second of the five Ahuja brothers, and his elder brother Madan completed their medical education from Lahore Medical College, now in Pakistan. The third, Inder and the fourth, Brij shifted to Madras Medical College halfway through their medical course because of the Partition in 1947. The last, Jagmohan joined the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. All the brothers wanted to serve in the Armed Forces. The eldest could not do so, for medical reasons. The rest, including Anand, served the country with great distinction. In fact, Anand and his immediate next sibling, Inder took up cardiothoracic surgery and cardiology, respectively and became pillars of their specialties in the Indian Armed Forces. Both of them rose to the rank of Lieutenant General and were decorated for their distinguished services.

Based on his academic brilliance and his inclination, General Ahuja was sent to the United Kingdom for his FRCS, to Yugoslavia for training in Cardiac Surgery and to Washington, DC, USA for training in open heart surgery. By his outstanding contribution to cardiothoracic surgery in the Armed Forces, he more than justified the faith reposed in him. Lung surgery, started in the Indian Army as early as 1945 by Leigh Collis of Birmingham, UK was refined by him to a fine art and he was largely responsible for laying the foundation for an impressive series of nearly four thousand lung operations that followed at the then only cardiothoracic centre of the Armed Forces at the ‘barrack hospital’ in Aundh, near Pune. He also standardized the closed heart procedures; for example, closed mitral valvotomy so that these could be replicated with consistent and good results.

Dr Ahuja’s greatest contribution was pioneering open heart surgery in the Indian Armed Forces. As early as 1967, dog experiments were conducted to familiarize the team with the steps of open heart surgery. The first few cases of atrial septal defect were done in 1969. Needless to say, only pioneers can internalize the trials and tribulations, the agony and the ecstasy of those early days. By the time he became Senior Adviser and later Professor of Surgery at the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune in 1975, he had already built up a good team of surgeons, anaesthesiologists, operating theatre and intensive care unit (ICU) nurses to continue the good work. For his untiring efforts, he was awarded the AVSM (Ati Vishisht Seva Medal) for distinguished service of an exceptional order by the President of India. More importantly, the vibrant centres of cardiothoracic surgery have multiplied to four in the Armed Forces and are doing commendable work. These have been built on the foundations laid by him.

A man of few words, his comments in scientific meetings, when he did make them were pertinent, incisive and reflected a great deal of professional wisdom. He was a perfectionist and a man who established systems in surgical practice, which are being followed even today. He carried this experience into general surgery and introduced much needed protocols in ICUs and operation theatres across the Armed Forces. He was greatly admired by his patients and students.

After his retirement from the Army, he had a second innings as a consultant general surgeon in the Police Hospital in Oman where to the astonishment of his colleagues, he performed many surgical procedures with great efficiency and success despite the long years of break from general surgery.

In his final years, apart from attending a charitable clinic, he played golf. He shall long be remembered as a surgeon of great calibre, a builder of institutions, a teacher who demanded and often got perfection from his students, a meticulous man who answered every letter personally and a warm human being who participated in social get-togethers with great gusto. Adieu, AM! We’ll miss you.

R.S. RAJAN, VSM
Vivekananda Institute for Leadership Development
CA-2, KIADB Industrial Housing Area, Ring Road
Hebbal, Mysore
Karnataka
drrsrajan@yahoo.co.uk