

The Great Neurosurgeon and Spinal Surgery— Col (Dr) Vijay Sagar Madan

The 60s and 70s were the period of post-independence pioneers and visionaries, and the Armed Forces Medical Services was no exception. The spark of Neurosurgery that was lit in post-independence Indian Army Medical Corps by Col AC Ray was nurtured and carried forward by officers like Col (Dr) Vijay Sagar Madan. Col Madan was born on 19th Feb 1938 at Hoshiarpur, Punjab. After initial education at Bareilly, he joined King George's Medical College, Lucknow, and graduated in 1962. Soon after graduation, he did Master of Surgery (General Surgery) from the same institution in 1965. During his residency in Surgery in 1964, he worked under Professor Prakash Narain Tandon, an experience which lit a spark turning his mind toward neurosurgery.



Vijay Sagar Madan

Responding to the call for national duty, he joined the Army in 1966, and in view of his aptitude and record of neurosurgical work, he was officially assigned to a Neurosurgical unit in 1968. At that time, there were a total of four neurosurgeons in the Army. He was posted to Command Hospital (Central Command) Lucknow, in 1969, where he was in-charge of a 60-bedded spinal surgery and Spinal Injury center. Here, in Oct 1970, he operated upon a Mukti Bahini Commander named Col Khaled Mosharraf for bullet injury to his right frontal lobe. The officer made a complete recovery. He was later in news once again on 03 Nov 1975, when he overthrew the coup leaders who had assassinated Sheikh Mujib-Ur-Rahman on 15 Aug 1975. Maj Gen Mosharraf assumed power under a Pro-Mujib caretaker President. Sadly, Maj Gen Mosharraf was assassinated on 7th Nov 1975.

Col Madan built the neurosurgical setup from a scratch, in each of the hospitals he was posted to, while accumulating neurosurgical experience, expertise and knowledge. This were to stand him in good stead during the 1971 war, when he was specially handpicked to establish a neurosurgical center at Command Hospital (Eastern Command) Calcutta (now Kolkata). He single-handedly managed all wartime patients with gunshot wounds to the brain and spinal cord. Two days after the surrender by the Pakistan Army in Dhaka, there was a request from the Pakistan Army surgeon for neurosurgical help to manage their wounded soldiers. Since there were no regular, scheduled flights to Dhaka, Col Madan was flown to Dhaka in a two seater aircraft from Times News group, where he successfully operated on several Pakistani soldiers.

Col Madan completed Master of Surgery (Neurosurgery) from KGMC, Lucknow in 1972. As a young neurosurgeon, he received the first E-Merck Gold Medal for his original work in a paper titled 'Delayed Laminectomy in Injuries of Conus Medullaris and Cauda Equina', presented during the Neurological Society of India Conference at Ahmedabad. Soon thereafter, he was selected for training in microsurgery and stereotactic surgery under Prof John Gillingham and spine surgery and anterior cervical approaches using Cloward technique under Mr Phillip Harris at Western General Hospital and Royal infirmary Edinburgh, Scotland 1975 to 1977. Upon his return to India, he was posted to Command Hospital (Southern Command) and Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, where he pioneered several techniques and approaches in spine surgery, and took active part in care of spinal injury patients. Later, he was posted to Army Hospital, Delhi Cantt, where he continued his pioneering work in spine surgery. He was one of the most popular teachers, and sought after neurosurgeons in the Armed Forces. Blessed with an infectious enthusiasm for professional excellence, he was a role model for many a young surgeons from the Armed Forces. During service, he received the DGAFFMS Gold Medal for standing first in the Senior Medical Officers Course in 1970. He received the Vishisht Seva Medal for meritorious service in 1985.

Despite a promising career ahead with prospects of promotion to higher ranks, Col Madan decided to opt for premature retirement from the Army in 1988. He joined Sir Gangaram Hospital, New Delhi in 1988 as a Senior Consultant. He established a spine surgery unit, and soon became one of the popular, sought after consultants with a busy practice. He was appointed Chairman of Neurosurgery from 1993 to 2001. He received the long service medal from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi for completing 20 years with that institution in 2008, and again in 2013 for completing 25 years of association with the institution. He continues to be Head of Neurospine unit and Adviser, the Department of Spinal Surgery, and Emeritus Consultant to the Institution.

Col Madan was the President of Delhi Neurological Association for 2 years (2000–2001), and of Neurotrauma Society of India in 2005. His Presidential Oration in 2005, titled 'Road Traffic Accidents: The Hidden Epidemic' addressed the magnitude of the problem of head injuries with their social implications. He received the Delhi Neurological Association Lifetime Achievement award in 2011 at GB Pant Hospital, New Delhi. He also received the Lifetime Achievement award from Spinal Cord Society of India in 2012, and another Lifetime Award from Association of Spinal Surgeons of India Conference held in 2012. During the Annual Conference of Neurological Society of India (First Indo-German Conference) in New Delhi in 2012, he was conferred with an award for development of Neurosciences in Delhi. He was elected the President of Delhi Spine Society in 2014.

Col Madan has several publications in National and International journals to his credit. He has been an active participant in various conferences in India and abroad, and has vast experience in the management of multisegmental cervical spondylosis, degenerative lumbar spine and trauma including wartime injuries. He remains professionally active, taking coronary artery bypass surgery and a recent shoulder surgery in his stride.

As a young, newly commissioned Captain, he met (then) Major (Miss) Santosh Kalra in Lucknow, and together they discovered that they were made for each other. They were married in 1970, and Lt Col (Mrs) Santosh Madan FRCOG, had a successful career in the Army as a Gynecologist. She decided to relinquish her service early, and has been managing the domestic and professional front with aplomb. Col and Mrs Madan live in New Delhi and are always keen to welcome anyone who drops by, and share their time with them.



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