



Presidential Address

Presidential address at the 32nd National Conference of IADVL, January 2004, Mumbai

It is with great pride and honor that I have taken on the mantle of the President of the IADVL. As I look back at my career in dermatology, I have had the good fortune to take on various roles, as teacher, clinician, and now the prestigious position of the President of this large association that boasts of nearly 4000 members, that conducts, among other activities, a National Conference every year, and publishes a bimonthly journal.

I remember very vividly the 1970 National Conference held jointly in Mumbai with the Associations of Physicians of India. I was a student then. We had a motley crowd of less than 200 delegates, and the conference was held in a medical college. Thirty four years later, we are a crowd of about 3500 delegates and the conference is conducted in a 5 star hotel. Whereas there was an interest in STDs and leprosy at that time, today there is a significant emphasis on dermato-surgery, dermatopathology, pediatric dermatology, cosmetology, HIV medicine and lasers – a paradigm shift of interest. This gives you an idea of which direction dermatology is heading and it is for us as an association to nurture these emerging interests. For this we need to start from the basics, which is to try to lay emphasis on the proper training of students in dermatology. We need to advise the board of studies of our universities to update the curriculum in dermatology to include those subjects of current interest. It should also prescribe a period of hands-on experience in those subjects before completion of the course.

Our country has a large number of patients with HIV infection. Thankfully the cost of treatment has come down considerably, allowing a large number of patients

to access treatment. However, proper testing facilities are still not available in many places. It would be a good service if every state branch of our association had HIV testing and counseling centers where patients can be given this facility at a reasonable cost. Our Maharashtra Branch is conducting one such centre with great success. At the same time we need to lay a lot of emphasis on the teaching of HIV medicine to our undergraduates, and to inculcate the art of counseling HIV patients to our postgraduates. The teaching of compassion to a young student can only come from the example of a compassionate teacher.

The advent of corticosteroids has helped us treat a number of inflammatory skin conditions, leaving behind a large number of untreatable conditions like vascular and pigmented nevi, tumors, scars, tattoos and unwanted hair. All those conditions are now treatable with the help of lasers. However, the exorbitant cost of this equipment has put these tools in the hands of business enterprises that will treat only conditions of commercial interest. We need to have collective groups of dermatologists working either along or in liaison with medical schools to start laser centres that will treat conditions of dermatological interest.

A disturbing trend that one comes across these days is the enormous amount of propaganda in the lay press about 'cures' for a number of skin conditions by alternate system of medicine. While we have no quarrel with any other system of medicine, false information has to be counteracted by giving the public the correct information in the press by way of informed articles.

There are often a large number of items in the agenda that require discussion at the central council meeting.





These meetings are held just before the AGM or are often clubbed with the AGM leaving little time for discussion. We need to have a mid year meeting of the central council so that by the time the next conference approaches there are concrete, well thought out proposals for the AGM.

It is a pleasure to see you all attend this conference is such large numbers. However, such large conferences are becoming increasingly difficult to organize, difficult to finance and difficult to make into an academic experience. With this in mind, this conference has for the first time arranged pre-conference workshops. Unfortunately, there has been an unprecedented response and we have had more people than we would like at a workshop. We accommodated as many as we

could in order not to dampen their enthusiasm. I hope these workshops with limited numbers will be a feature of our state and national level conferences in the future and also periodically throughout the year.

While I have taken a back seat in the arrangements of this conference, I have watched with immense pride the diligence and enthusiasm with which our young colleagues have shouldered responsibilities and worked day and night in the last few months to try and make this conference a “feast for the mind”. And when I see this and hear that constant refrain “India Shining”, I tell myself can Indian Dermatology be far behind?

R. J. Fernandez

