

Obituary



Dr T.C. Anand Kumar - a doyen in reproductive biology

Dr T.C. Anand Kumar, the pioneer of India's first scientifically documented test tube baby, passed away on January 26, 2010 at the age of 74. A reproductive biologist of international repute, he will always be remembered for his diverse contributions ranging from the role of the neuro-endocrine system in reproduction, developing the means of administering hormones via the nasal route and spearheading the team that produced India's first test tube baby at the ICMR's Institute for Research in Reproduction and the KEM Hospital, Mumbai, in 1986. After his retirement as the Director of the Institute for Research in Reproduction, Mumbai, he founded Hope Infertility Clinic in Bangalore in 1991 where many of the first generation of ART specialists in the country were trained and started their careers in this field.

A graduate from Bangalore, he attained his doctorate from the University of Jodhpur and then went on to Birmingham, UK to pursue his research. Despite several job opportunities provided to him in UK, he returned to India. He started the electron microscopy laboratory at the All India Institute Medical Sciences, New Delhi, in 1970 which is still functional today. He served at this premier Institute from 1969 to 1982 where he was committed to teaching medical students and also started the neuro-endocrine research laboratory.

Dr Anand Kumar founded the Indian Society for the Study of Reproduction and Fertility in 1988 comprising members representing distinguished scientists, public health executives, programme managers and clinicians from the field of reproductive sciences which is an active and flourishing society today.

He continued sharing his wisdom and experience with the younger generation of scientists by serving as an advisor on many committees on the World Health Organization, Department of Science and Technology, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, Government of India; Department of Biotechnology, Government of India and, of course, the Indian Council of Medical Research till September 2009.

His work was recognized by his peers and he received the Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar Award, the highest scientific award for mid-career scientists in the country and the Sanjay Gandhi National Award. He was a fellow of prestigious Indian Academy of Science, the National Academy of Medical Sciences (India) and also of the Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

A visionary, Dr Anand Kumar was equally concerned about the welfare of his patients seeking treatment with newer reproductive technologies. When the first scientifically documented test tube baby was born, he was always questioned whether an over populated country needed test tube babies. With this modality of treatment gaining acceptance and hundreds of clinics operating in India, he took a lead in formulating the ICMR's National Guidelines for Accreditation, Supervision and Regulation of ART Clinics in India.

A man who stood for truth had the greatness to give away his fame and glory of being the pioneer of India's first test tube baby when he discovered all the hand-written notes of Dr Subhas Mukerjee.

Dr Mukerjee from Kolkata had claimed to have created a test tube baby in 1979 (the second in the world) but his claims were neither substantiated nor recognized by scientists or the authorities leading to the man ending his life prematurely. Dr Anand Kumar had the courage to research his predecessors' findings and scientifically present it to the world giving Dr Mukerjee his due place in medical history. Such generosity and honesty are very rare and precious attributes of Dr Anand Kumar.

Dr Anand Kumar's love for science and the search for the truth will always be remembered. His students who are now highly placed all over the world would always cherish the memories of their mentor. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

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