

# DR PURSHOTAM LAL: 'FATHER OF INTERVENTIONAL CARDIOLOGY' WITH A HEART FOR RURAL HEALTH



Destinies are defined by life's travesties. Those who conquer the challenges go on to become legends. One such globally acclaimed name is **Dr. Purshotam Lal, Chairman, Metro Group of Hospitals, Noida**, who earned the moniker 'Father of Interventional Cardiology' for his pioneering initiative of introducing the largest number of innovations in interventional cardiology, as alternative to open heart surgery, in India and got listed in 'Limca Book of World Records' many times. Recipient of **Padma Bhushan in 2003, Padma Vibhushan in 2009, he has also been honoured with Prestigious Dr. B.C. Roy National Award by the President of India for developing interventional cardiology in the country and "Distinguished Achievement Award of Highest Order" by the National Forum of Indian Medical Association (2006-07) for performing the largest number of angioplasties/stentings in the country as a single operator, "Life Time Achievement Award" by Times of India and Delhi Medical Association by Shri Arun Jaitley. Listed several times in 'Limca Book of World Records'**, Dr. Lal has been an academician of repute, has traversed the entire spectrum of cardiac care for making cost-effective, world-class treatment accessible, particularly, to the lesser privileged of the society. The state-of-art Metro Hospitals, stand testimony to Dr Lal's indomitable spirit and mission in strengthening India's 'Healthcare'.

## When did your involvement with Interventional Cardiology begin?

While based in the US in nineteen eighties, I started working with various interventional cardiac devices. Having worked with Professor Kaltenbach of Frankfurt, Germany I was involved in the clinical development of slow rotational angioplasty to open up totally blocked artery and introduced the same first time in India in 1989. I was told by the company that it happens to be one of the first ten cases in world. Thereafter in 1990 I happened to introduced several devices in India to save the patient from open heart surgery like coronary atherectomy to take the fat out of the blocked coronary artery, rotablator (diamond drilling) to deal with the calcified arteries helping out many elderly patients unfit for bypass surgery and conventional angioplasty. Also Dr. Inoue from Japan helped me to start opening of the tight mitral valve with the help of Inoue balloon, the most popular balloon in the world even today. In 1991 I did the first case of coronary stenting made of Tantalum as a bailout procedure on a patient from Maldives who still comes for follow-up. In 1992 I performed the first procedure of ASD Closure (heart

hole closure) with monodisc device, a boon for young girls saving them from the ugly scar. Cardiological Society of India honoured me with Dr.V.V. Shah Oration Gold Medal in 1992 for introducing challenging procedures. I was fortunate enough to perform the first case of Aortic Valve Replacement without surgery (TAVI) with Core Valve in July 2004 and both of these procedures being the first time in the world.

## Why did you choose to come back to India knowing very well that the task ahead was daunting?

Rural health is a subject very close to my heart as I come from a humble background with roots in the village where I did my schooling. I struggled to survive during my growing up years, but my academic brilliance was the only hope to a better future. Once I went to medical college at Amritsar, the electricity came to our village. My father in his late 40s suffered from the electric shock due to poor electrical fitting and sadly died primarily due to non-availability of the medical help. It was an incident that jolted my conscious and to the harsh reality of absolute lack and neglect of healthcare in rural areas. My focus, since then, was always on rural

health and I started working towards it. In 1984-85, I wrote numerous articles on rural health for garnering attention towards the prevailing issues and my heart was on improving rural health, despite my field and speciality being different. I went on to develop a three-point formula and it was my desire that I should come back to India and do something in this area for which I even joined the Medical Council, as Board of Governor for two years where I presented and pursued the 3-point formula very aggressively. Even today, if the three-point formula is adopted and implemented I can vouch that even super specialists will go to the villages. Unfortunately, it's a dream unfulfilled till now, but the concept of 3-point formula and its impact on health care is still alive and I shall be pursuing it with more vigour.

## Why did you set up Metro Hospital in Noida?

I returned to India and joined Apollo Hospital, Delhi as a Coordinator of the department in 1996 with a mission and passion to take healthcare particularly cardiology to great heights. It was at that time lot of patients from my village and surrounding areas including some of my teachers used to come for the treatment however,

they were not in a position to pay the commercial cost which led me to start Metro Hospital in Noida in 1997-98 with the aim to provide comprehensive healthcare at an affordable cost. For 8 years, we served almost at the rates of AIIMS and started several hospitals in the remote areas with a view to serve the low middle class people at the door steps. It was a challenge to win the confidence of patients who use to be reluctant to get the treatment at Noida hospitals due to prevailing lawless atmosphere. Over a period of time patient started having trust in us and our goal remained the same to provide advanced care at the affordable cost. Our strength has been our patients who always appreciated and led me to make bold statements that I have no regrets coming back to India, today I take it with a pinch of salt after many unpleasant experiences, and at times think that the decision was a mistake.

## What inspires you to rise the bar of excellence at Metro Hospitals?

Am not one to be in the rat race of numbers, but the joy of a patient going back home after successful treatment is what matters to me and inspires me to do better. A smile of my patients has always been my best awards. We have been involved in lot of research of developing new techniques at Metro and when I look back I am surprised that how come I happened to perform almost all the procedures in the field of interventional cardiology for the first time in the country and the list has more than 20 procedures. Our credibility also comes from appearing in the Indian Heart Journal, an Index Medicus-Medline Journal, that carried the research papers on all the procedures I performed for the first time in the country. As a matter of fact all these scientific papers got presented and published for the first time in the country as well. Media always appreciated each and every new procedure. We have now 12 hospitals as a part of Metro Group of Hospitals serving mostly low middle class patients and it becomes our duty to use low cost techniques. Various experts from other countries like Netherland, France, Germany who saw us doing the procedures in our cath lab have complimented our efforts to reduce the cost and sent the testimonials to this effect. Even the core valve intervention that we were first to do in the world, countries like Italy, China, Germany invited me to present the first case of TAVI with Core Valve in the world. Recently I presented a guest lecture on 'Evolution of Cardiology'. It is at this time the Chairman Professor Dr. Adnan Kastrati from Germany named me as '**Father of Interventional Cardiology in India**' for introducing largest number of techniques in the country and issued a certificate to this effect. Professor Kastrati has been one of the most popular and renowned interventional cardiologist in the world.

## In coming years, what do you envision for Metro Group?

I have plans to build affordable super speciality medicines where committed doctors will run the show. The

litmus test is in finding the right people who are driven by the passion to serve mankind and are overboard in their dealings. For them sky would be the limit. Until now rural health, stint in the medical council, and other vexing issues took my maximum attention, a phase now left behind, I hope to find more time to focus on the med-city project. In India, the concept 'Bigger is Better' is in vogue, but we would do it with a humane twist by making the proposed med-cities in Noida extension, Faridabad and Vadodara, truly affordable where our culture of "patient first" is followed. The day I can proudly state, "We have never ever returned any patient for want of money," it would mean meeting my mission half-way, because rural health still occupies a large part of my heart. We dedicate OPD funds entirely to charity causes with the intention to help maximum number of needy people. This spirit of service would encompass the medi-city projects planned to come up.

## In an ever-evolving healthcare scenario, what is your mantra of success to aspiring youth and young doctors?

The medical field is a very pious field because you deal with the life of a patient. I would encourage that one should try to get into the wonderful medical profession that gives you immense satisfaction and also comes with some level of security. Once you become a doctor, the most important thing is that you have to adopt the patient like one of your own family. In real sense, adoption of the patient is an automatic phenomenon, and if you do so you just cannot go wrong. Sharing my life as a doctor-I had a flourishing practice in the US for 15 years. Even after returning to India, I did the largest number of interventions in the country as a single operator, setting a new unchallenged benchmark. I continued to do all the complex cases here as well as abroad. There are absolutely no shortcuts to success. Till today, I never have faced any malpractices because when we give our 100 percent to our patient, we adopt a patient. This culture of bonding with the patient by and large does exist in our profession.

## There was time when an exodus to foreign countries seeking greener pastures by doctors was the norm. What is the current scenario?

Doctors who have studied and are practicing here in India, or those who have returned from abroad for varying reasons, are the ones who are shouldering the huge healthcare responsibilities of this country. With the health sector undergoing marked transformation following liberalization and many private players in the fray establishing corporate hospitals, Indian doctors practising abroad saw bright career prospects,

who then returned in large numbers. In recent years, the pace has slackened. India in comparison with other western countries has made a lot of progress in all specialties, but then despite the growth we still have to catch up in major advances in some of the specialities. There is a lot to be improved and my wish is to see in my lifetime that the best of healthcare facilities reaches to those at the grassroots, a true indicator of our success as a nation.

## Prestigious Awards Honored to Dr. Purshotam Lal

- 1985 – Best Teacher Award in USA
- 1990 – 2nd Jawaharalal Nehru International Excellence Award
- 1991 – Rajiv Gandhi Award
- 1992 – Dr V V Shah Oration Gold Medal by Cardiological Society of India for his pioneering contributions in Interventional Cardiology
- 1993 – Best Interventional Cardiologist, Chennai
- 1993 – Selected for Padma Shri
- 2002 – Life Time Achievement Award - by Late Shri Arun Jaitley on behalf of Delhi Medical Association
- 2003 – Padma Bhushan by the President of India
- 2004 – Dr B C Roy National Award by the President of India for developing Interventional Cardiology in India
- 2004 – Dr. B.L. Taneja Memorial Guest Lecture Award by Delhi Medical Association, 2004
- 2006-2007 – Distinguished Achievement Awards of Highest Order by National Forum of Indian Medical Association for performing the largest number of Angioplasties / Stentings as a single operator in the country
- 2009 – Padma Vibhushan by The President of India
- 2009 – Dr. Wiliam Ganz Oration by World Congress of Cardiology
- 2015 – The World's Greatest Brands 2015 ASIA & GC
- 2016 – Awarded "World's Best Leader" in Indo-UAE Business Summit, 2016
- 2017 – Life Time Achievement Award by The Times of India

