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Obituary

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OBITUARY

Dr C M Francis

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Dr C M Francis who passed away in Trichur in Kerala on January 21, 2009 was a man of many accomplishments, whose professional life extended over a period of more than five decades. He made his mark in the areas of medical education, community health, health policy and planning, community based rehabilitation, rational drug use and medical ethics.

Dr Francis underwent his basic medical education at the Madras Medical College. He later did his Ph D in physiology at the Cambridge University in the U K, with a special interest in the field of endocrinology. After finishing his studies, he returned to his home state of Kerala and was a part of the faculty of the government medical colleges in that state. He became principal of the medical colleges at Calicut and Kottayam, before he was appointed the founder-director of Sree Chitra Tirunal Medical Centre for Advanced Studies in Specialities, Trivandrum.

In 1974, Dr Francis was invited to head St John's Medical College, Bangalore as its dean, a position he held till 1982. During this time, he developed the academic and administrative framework of the newly established institution, including the expansion of its community health work. He is remembered for capably steering the construction of the hospital and college buildings, and for greening the campus - most of the trees around the buildings were planted at his initiative. His concern for academic standards sometimes brought him into conflict with some of the senior faculty of the institution - he was against the faculty doing private practice, and closely monitored the quality of teaching. He showed an equal concern for the students, though he was regarded by some as a strict disciplinarian. He was against ragging and tried to enforce a ban on it. Sports and other extra-curricular activities were encouraged.

He was associated with several other universities, hospitals and medical colleges. His vast experience in hospital and health management was brought together in a book on hospital administration, co-authored with a graduate of St John's Medical College.

Dr Francis was a member of the Karnataka State Task Force on Health and Family Welfare and played a vital role in the drafting of its report. He contributed to the planning on primary and secondary health care, and health systems development. The chapter on Vision 2020 was his special contribution to the document.

He had a deep interest in the ethical dimension of health care, and was instrumental in introducing the subject in the undergraduate medical curriculum. He wrote a book on medical ethics, which is a prescribed reference textbook for undergraduate medical students. He served on the ethics committees of several hospitals. His long term commitment to this area of health care was recognised at the Second National Bioethics Conference in 2007, when he was felicitated.

Continuing medical education was another area where Dr Francis was a pioneer. He set up the department of continuing medical education at the Christian Medical College in Vellore. This department conducts regular training for medical professionals all over the country through distance learning methods as well as contact sessions. To this day it remains the only such department in any medical college in India.

Dr Francis was the founding editor of the magazine *Health Action* which is perhaps the most widely read health magazine in India. He brought to the publication an emphasis on community health, but also covered many other related areas of health work like essential drugs, rational use of drugs, low-cost health care, medical ethics, health and hospital administration. His meticulous editorship of the magazine ensured that articles on these subjects were easily understood even by lay persons.

The values of integrity, transparency and accountability in professional life were very dear to Dr Francis. In his administrative responsibilities he was never afraid of taking unpopular decisions if he felt they were right.

Dr Francis was an unfailing source of reliable advice, help and guidance to many in the field of community medicine and public health. Behind his simple and unassuming demeanour was a razor sharp mind. He was a good listener and his opinion or advice (which was very frequently sought) drew on his extensive experience in different areas of health care. He was particularly encouraging and supportive to students and young professionals (including myself), especially when they were discouraged and disillusioned. He will be very sorely missed.

May his dear soul rest in peace.