

REMEMBERING LATE DR. C.M. FRANCIS

The late Dr. CM Francis was a towering personality in the fields of medical and health care, ethics and medical education. He provided leadership and was a source of support and guidance to many institutions and individuals over more than five decades of active professional life. His consistent commitment to community health was such that he was often called Community Medicine Francis. His contribution to CHAI and Health Action will for long be remembered by many people across the country.

Dr. C.M. Francis graduated in Medicine from Madras Medical College and completed his Ph.D in Physiology from Cambridge University with a deep interest in Endocrinology. He returned to Kerala after his studies and worked in various government medical colleges in Kerala – Calicut, Kottayam and others and also became Principal of two of these colleges before he was appointed as Founder Director of Sree Chitra Tirunal Medical Centre for Advanced Studies in Specialities, Thiruvananthapuram. He was also a visiting Professor in the faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Canada.

In 1974 the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, invited him as the Dean of St. John's Medical College. He provided leadership to this premier institution till 1982 expanding and developing further its work in Community Health and strengthened its academic and administrative foundations. He was a member of the syndicate, senate and academic council of several universities and also member of the governing bodies of a number of hospitals and ethics committees. He was the Founder President of the Indian Society of Health Administrators (ISHA) Bangalore.

After completing his tenure with St. John's he was involved with several institutions of which three were particularly significant. He was the coordinator of the Continuing Medical Education unit of Christian Medical College, Vellore; the Director of St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore, and later President of the Society for Community Health Awareness, Research and Action, Bangalore and senior consultant in its functional unit, the Community Health Cell (CHC). During his post retirement innings particularly with CHC he played many important roles and was involved in several significant initiatives. He was founder & editor of Health Action, the popular health magazine of the Health for All Trust of the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) and a policy consultant to CHAI. He was the Founder Convenor of the Community Based Rehabilitation Forum (CBR Forum) based in Bangalore, which is supporting CBR projects all over the country.

He was invited regularly as a consultant to the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences in Karnataka to advise on Health Human Power Development and Medical Ethics. One of the most important roles he also undertook was as a key member of the Karnataka Government Task Force on Health and Family Welfare and provided the frame work for strengthening of Primary and Secondary Health Care and Health System Development in the state. The chapter on Vision 2020 was his special contribution apart from substantial inputs and editorial support to the whole document.

Dr. Francis brought together his rich experience in hospital and health management in a special publication entitled Hospital Administration (Jaypee Brother Medical Publishers, 1991,) which has seen many editions, the latest being co-authored with Dr. Mario D'Souza, a Johnite alumnus. He himself was a reliable and accessible 'ready reckoner' on managerial, administrative issues in health care to whom many harried professionals turned to for advice.

His long term interest in medical ethics resulted in a short text book on Medical Ethics (Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers, 1993). This is a prescribed reference text book for the ethics curriculum for undergraduate medical students in the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences in Karnataka. Dr. Francis was very involved in the introduction of Ethics into the undergraduate medical curriculum by this university. Dr. C.M. Francis was felicitated at the Second National Bio-Ethics Conference held in late 2007 in recognition of his long standing commitment and contribution to the field of medical ethics and to the realization of health as a human right.



All of us who worked closely with him in all these various institutions especially St. John's Medical College - Bangalore, Catholic Health Association of India – Secunderabad, Christian Medical College, Vellore, St. Martha's Hospital - Bangalore, CHC of the Society for Community Health Awareness, Research and Action - Bangalore, and CBR Forum, Bangalore will remember him as a serious and committed administrator, an inspiring and conscientious advisor, an ethical and socially sensitive humanist and above all a wonderful friend, philosopher and guide.

We have known him as students and young faculty members and subsequently worked closely with him in CHC since 1994. This latter period was one during which he had great patience and calm spending time with students, community health interns and fellows, team members and many visitors who sought his advice. This was a shift from the earlier days when he was known and feared by some as a strict disciplinarian! He reminded us that the Latin root of the word doctor, meant to be a teacher. Over time he had honed his skills in teaching and in listening as an art. He always suggested and promoted the inclusion and involvement of students and young professionals in all initiatives, recognizing the fresh ideas and energy that they brought, and also providing them the opportunity to learn and grow. He seemed to have an inexhaustible source of energy and was always willing to put his shoulder to the wheel working long hours developing essential drug lists, developing teaching material and manuals etc. Along with a keen intellect his was a pool of wisdom from which many people drew ideas and strength. Even during his busiest days he found the time to read at least for a couple of hours! He was therefore very well informed on a wide range of subjects. The word 'discipline' he also reminded us came from discipleship to a higher being and purpose. He was an optimist who felt that there was no task that was not possible.

He was accompanied and supported in life by a most wonderful wife and family who were generous in sharing him with so many others. They have our deep gratitude, as well as our sympathy and prayers on his passing on from this life.

May his soul rest in peace!

CHC Team