

## From the Editor's Desk

### **In Defence of The Pharmaceutical Teachers**

The 36th Indian Pharmaceutical Congress was held at Bangalore recently. The Presidential address was devoted almost entirely to the subject of teachers of our country. We are indebted to President for the "idea germ" that triggered this volume's editorial. The address has attempted to analyze the cause of the general rot that has set in the academic sphere of our country; in doing so the Learned President has made a scathing, stinging attack on all teachers, including those teaching Pharmacy, and made them the villains of the sordid episode. Unfortunately, the President has failed to come up with any convincing and concrete solution for the malady, except for some "this should be done" & "that should be done". A whisper campaign has been going on for the last five or six years, alleging that the standards of Pharmacy education is deteriorating and it seems that the Presidential address was an outcome of this campaign; we are sure that the views expressed by the President were more in anguish than anything else.

We recommend that the address be read in its entirety to fathom the full impact of the President's views. However, we will briefly summarize his points as a) Pharmacy teachers are demanding more and more

material benefits but are not conscious of the interests of the learners; b) Pharmacy teachers have lost all sense of discipline, accountability and innovation in instructional methods, and c) The National Pharmacy Institution, if and when established, will act as a panacea for all ills of the Pharmacy profession in India.

We would now like to comment on the observations made by the President. Pharmacy education in the country is a little over fifty years old. The pioneers are no longer actively engaged in the field. The present rung of the pharmaceutical teachers is composed of three categories, the Dons, the not-so-young teachers and the young entrants. After the pioneers, the present Dons were supposed to have taken pharmaceutical teaching forward on the path of advancement. They were expected to be the leaders by acting as a bond between the learners and the newer entrants in the faculty. Instead of acting as "leaders", we are sorry-nay, pained, to observe that they acted as mere "managers" of pharmacy teaching. A regression from the 'leader' to the 'manager' status has given rise to a host of intractable difficulties, because a good manager need not necessarily be a good leader. By acting as leaders the Dons would have shown the next generation of teachers the ways and means to be ado-

pted for making the curriculum relevant to needs of the time. Instead, the Dons engaged themselves more in professional meetings, corridor discussions, pharmaceutical conferences, technical committee meetings and rhetoric, all seemingly aimed at better, relevant, need-based educational curricula. But all these remained as mere rhetoric only, because the Dons failed to act as leaders in putting the proposed ideas to practice. The Dons were, most probably, taken over by a sense of complacency, because the untiring and selfless work of the pioneers had started bearing fruit by the time they (The Dons) had joined as faculty members. As a result, the next generation of pharmaceutical teachers were only vaguely aware as to how to put the ideas to practice. The present young teachers are, by contrast, very enthusiastic about a change in the teaching curricula but again, due to a lack of dedicated leaders, are at a loss to decide their course of action. Our observation that the Dons have denigrated into "managers" is amply substantiated by the fact that they are holding administrative posts, and thus, hold controlling positions in all spheres of pharmaceutical education and administration. One comes across the same half-a-dozen faces in different committee meetings, selection committees and guest lectures. There is no dearth of talented and experienced pharmaceutical teachers in India; in spite of this, one will frequently find a Don of one speciality acting as an expert in the selection of the faculty of another speciality. This speaks volumes about the basic "integrity" and "detachment" of the stalwarts. The subject of research in the various disciplines of pharmacy may now be dwelt upon. On the very outset, we painfully agree that pharmacy

research in India has not been able to keep pace with the progress & development seen abroad. A big WHY such progress is lacking in our country confronts us. The Presidential address tries to answer this "WHY" with some preconceived notions, which are, at best, half truths and biased. We agree with the President's observation that "research leadership should emerge from the University", and "research institutions should function within the folds of the Universities or in their close association." We have a strong feeling that the envisaged leadership is nowhere in sight. Moreover, Universities are reluctant, rather unwilling, to relinquish their unique capabilities of unrestricted exploratory research and freedom of action. Unless there is a healthy partnership between the Universities and the pharmaceutical industry in the wise utilization of mutual facilities and increased understanding of each other's role, we are afraid that no tangible progress can be made in pharmaceutical research. Denigrating the whole teaching community for the stagnation is too simplistic an explanation. How many of the so-called "leaders" have taken pains to build up a healthy partnership with the pharmaceutical industry? Even a conscientious research worker loses interest in dedicated research work not because he intends to use the institution as a spring board, but because he loses heart and suffers from a feeling of being abandoned due to the preferential treatment given to some candidates who do not deserve it.

The President has expressed his displeasure about the manner in which (a handful of) teachers do their jobs. Research is given precedence over teaching ability & innovativeness in teaching methods in all interviews

for faculty positions. A very pertinent question naturally crops up : which is more important routine teaching, or research work? Are we not basically teachers first to train our students and to lay the ground for their future activities as professionals ? If this is true, then why should a person be evaluated by his research output only for appointment as a faculty member ? Surely research capability is also important, but certainly it is not the sole criteria for selection. Moreover, lower and middle rung faculty members are in not in any way involved by the administration in the formulation & implementation of policies and principles of academic matters. This results in a sort of "disinterest" on the part of the teachers, who feel left out of the policy decisions and develop a feeling that they are not a part of the whole set up and only act as "carriers" of the directives dumped on them from above. Our experience also shows that quite frequently student misbehaviours are watered down drastically by the administration, with the result that disruptionist elements are not punished and the dignity and prestige of the complainant teacher is frequently at peril. Is it not the bounden duty of the administration and that includes the Dons also, to treat all such matters of student indiscipline with a heavy hand ? We are tempted to site an incidence involving the late Professor G. P. Srivastava. A particular student of Department had misbehaved with him; Dr. Srivastava had the courage to punish the guilty in such a way that the Department was practically free from trouble for a long time to come. Moreover, Dr. Srivastava had set very high standards of self control, leadership and discipline by example that acted as the beacon-light for many future teachers who

were once his disciples. Unfortunately, the later-time Dons could not carry his principles to the implementation stage.

We have been hearing of the National Pharmacy Institute off and on in such tones that tends to create an impression that this Institute, once it comes into being, will suddenly lift our profession from the quagmire in which it is presently stuck. Nothing of the sort is going to happen unless a fair degree of goodwill, pragmatic approaches and honest attitudes are exercised by all involved in the pharmacy training and research.

The role and involvement of the Indian Pharmaceutical Association (IPA) and Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) as the two prime professional organizations in the country have not been touched upon in the Presidential address. We have a feeling that the IPA should act as the front runner organization in pharmacy for bringing about the implementation of a relevant, need-based pharmacy curricula. Moreover, University-industry partnership may very well be fruitfully brought about by active participation of the IPA, a role which this body has probably never considered worthwhile. The IPA has never seriously attempted to fuse together the intellect that is found scattered in the institutions and the industry. The story of the PCI is more dismal. Though it is supposed to exercise control over pharmacy education at the diploma level, its rules and directives are flouted with impunity. Persons with a master's degree in Chemistry are often preferred to Pharmacy degree holders and there are any number of heads of diploma pharmacy institutions appointed out of chemistry degree holders.

In conclusion, we would like to strongly advocate that the present need is to make our noble profession equal in standard and sphere of activity to that found elsewhere in the developed countries. This can only be done by active leadership and not rhetoric alone. Much is expected of the stalwarts, the Dons in the institutions.