

In Memoriam: Rakesh K. Tandon, MD, PhD (1941–2020)



Gastroenterology lost a leader with the passing of Dr Rakesh K. Tandon on August 3, 2020 (Figure 1). He was recognized internationally as an outstanding teacher, clinician, and researcher, and was a mentor to countless physicians throughout his career.

Dr Tandon received his MD at the K.G. Medical College in Lucknow, India, in 1966; his residency in medicine at the Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island; Clinical Fellowship in Gastroenterology at Rhode Island and V.A. Hospitals in Providence; and Research Fellowship in Gastroenterology at Albany Medical College and Affiliated Hospitals in Albany, New York. This training prepared him for a lifetime career in academic medicine.

In 1971, rather than staying in the United States, he returned to India and attained medical leadership roles in the country that he loved. His career in academic medicine started at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences as a Lecturer in Medicine (Figure 2). For many years, he worked closely with Dr Badri Tandon, who was Head of the Department of Gastroenterology. Rakesh distinguished himself as a clinician and teacher. He also sought additional training in research and, in 1981, was awarded a PhD in gastroenterology by the All India Institute. He was appointed as Professor and Head of the Department of Gastroenterology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 1991, a position he held with distinction until his retirement from the Institute in 2003. During this tenure, the department's reputation continued to increase and his extraordinary leadership was recognized throughout the Institute. In 1987, he was selected to be Sub-Dean of the Institute and in 2016 he received a Lifetime Achievement award.

In 2003, Dr Tandon continued his academic career as Medical Director

and Head of the Department of Gastroenterology at Pushpawati Singhania Research Institute for Liver, Renal & Digestive Diseases in New Delhi, until his passing this year.

His academic and research backgrounds allowed him to make major contributions to knowledge in several fields, most notably in biliary diseases, therapeutic endoscopy, and pancreatic diseases. In all, Dr Tandon published nearly 300 research papers, 87 chapters in books, and 6 books. In biliary diseases, his basic research on bile salts significantly increased our knowledge of bile salt metabolism and gallstone formation. His early publications evaluated the effect of bile on lipid absorption and the relative proportions of biliary cholesterol, phospholipids and bile salts in Indian patients with cholelithiasis.

As an internationally renowned researcher and clinician, from 1981 to 1982, he was Humboldt Fellow at Universitätsklinikum der Gasamthochschule Essen (University Medical School of Essen), West Germany. From 1989 to 1990, he was Visiting Associate Professor of Gastroenterology at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, where he worked with Dr Martin Carey. While in Germany, he published an analysis of ketonic bile acids in feces, and while in Boston he participated in the study of microscope laser light scattering spectroscopy of primary bile secretion. He also published on the treatment of complications of cirrhosis and clinical features of veno-occlusive disease.

In therapeutic endoscopy, he published on the role of endotherapy for pain in chronic pancreatitis and endoscopic papillotomy to manage choledocholithiasis and biliary sepsis. Dr Tandon was widely sought for his clinical judgment, his teaching, and his endoscopic skills. One of us (P.B.) had the pleasure of traveling with Dr Tandon to medical centers in India, with a focus on tropical pancreatitis. At each center, Dr Tandon spent hours with faculty, house staff, and students reviewing difficult management decisions and assisting in complex endoscopic procedures.

In pancreatic diseases, he published on oxidative stress in chronic pancreatitis and participated in a randomized controlled trial of antioxidant supplementation for pain relief. This trial provided evidence for the potential benefit of antioxidants to treat pain in selected patients with chronic pancreatitis. He also published several outstanding articles on necrotizing pancreatitis, including on complications such as infection and organ failure. He also published numerous articles regarding the clinical features and treatment of tropical calcific pancreatitis and coauthored an international guideline on the management of acute pancreatitis.

Dr Tandon recognized the importance of establishing a formal pancreas study group in India, and founded, along with Drs. H Ramesh and Philip Augustine, the Indian Pancreas Club in 2004. The club members meet yearly to research and discuss clinical issues related to pancreatic disorders in addition to international gatherings, including with the International Association of Pancreas at a well-attended meeting in 2011 in Kochi, Kerala, India, and, in 2014, he organized the Asian Oceanic Pancreatic Association that included participants from Asia, Australia, and around the world.



Figure 1. Dr Rakesh Kumar Tandon



Figure 2. Addressing a Joint conference at the All India Institute of Medicine, New Delhi, India.

Dr Rakesh Tandon had a major influence on the training of a generation of leaders in gastroenterology. As a professor of medicine at the All India Institute of Medicine in New Delhi, he inspired many students to pursue careers in academic medicine. Many of his students have developed into academic leaders internationally. Dr Jay Pasricha, for example, was inspired by him as a medical student and is a lead researcher in his field and now serves as the Director of the Johns Hopkins

center for Neuro-gastroenterology in the United States.

To increase focused mechanistic pancreatic research in India, Dr Tandon established a training program with Dr Ashok Saluja's group, one of the premier groups in the study of pancreatic disorders in the United States. Two of this program's trainees have since established programs in the study of pancreatic disorders in India. Dr Pramod Garg is currently a professor of Gastroenterology at the All India

Institute of Medical Sciences and secretary of the International Association of Pancreatology. Another mentee, Dr Rupjyoti Talukadar, is an Associate Professor and Director of a pancreatic research program at the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology in Hyderabad, India. These investigators are among the next generation of leaders for the advancement of disorders of the pancreas.

Dr Tandon also developed a distinguished training program in Digestive Diseases in India. His trainees occupy leadership positions in academic gastroenterology in India and at international meetings. Dr Subrat Acharya, for example, served as Chief of Gastroenterology at the All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (SGPGI), New Delhi, and is past president of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology and Indian Association for the Study of Liver. Dr Gourdas Choudhuri served as Chief of Gastroenterology at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, and is also a past president of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology. Dr Vivek Saraswat is the current Chief of Gastroenterology at SGPGI, Lucknow, India, and was president of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology. Dr Govind Makharia, Professor of Gastroenterology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, India, currently serves as the Secretary-General of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology.

Dr Tandon received many awards for excellence in teaching and lifetime achievement from organizations, including the Indian Society of Gastroenterology and the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. In 2000, he received the prestigious Dr BC Roy Award for his contributions to medicine as an Eminent teacher by the President of India. Dr Tandon was a Fellow of many international organizations including the American Gastroenterological Association, the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, and the National Academy of Sciences in India, and was awarded Master of World Gastroenterology by the World Congress of Gastroenterology (Figure 3).

Dr Tandon was a great believer in the merits and the dividends from



Figure 3. Among the masters of World Gastroenterology Organization, London, 2009.

face-to-face scientific exchanges between investigators from different parts of the world and he vigorously promoted international meetings. In 1992, he organized the Indian Society Gastroenterology- American Gastroenterology Association Satellite Symposium on IBD in New Delhi. He also organized the Indian Society Gastroenterology-American Gastroenterology Association Satellite Symposium in September 2000 in New Delhi. In 2008, he organized the Asia-Pacific Digestive Week with the active participation of the World Gastroenterology Organization, and then the World Organization of Digestive Endoscopy and the American Society of Gastroenterology in New Delhi, India. This meeting was oversubscribed and highly rated.

Dr Tandon was an invited speaker at international conferences throughout his career, most notably at national meetings of the American Gastroenterological Association, Asian Pacific Congress, International Association of Pancreatology, and the World Congress of Gastroenterology. He also was an invited speaker at postgraduate conferences held in many countries throughout the world, including the United States, Australia, China, Russia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Japan. He was given the responsibility of organizing many additional conferences including International conferences on clinical

nutrition, AIDS, and hepatitis, and Asia Pacific Digestive Week.

Dr Tandon held many leadership positions in medicine in India and throughout the world. He was Editor in Chief of *The Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, section editor of hepatobiliary and pancreatology of the *Biomedical Journal of Gastroenterology*, President of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology, President of both the Indian and the Asian Societies of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition. He was an editorial board member of many journals including the *Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology and Pancreatology*.

Dr Tandon's personal traits endeared him to his patients and colleagues. He was soft spoken, kind, and thoughtful. He was a good listener, but did not hesitate to present his own point of view. He had a unique ability to interact with individuals with diverse points of view and obtain consensus. He did not call attention to himself. He would rather compliment those with whom he worked. His leadership style was quiet, but there was never any doubt about his leadership. He was a dedicated physician and a mentor to countless physicians throughout his career. A statement that he made frequently underscores his commitment to hard work, dedication to his patients, and his concern for family,

friends, and country: "We are here to do our Dharma (or duty) to mankind."

He is survived by his wife, Manju, who did her pediatric training in Albany Medical Center and was a devoted family medicine practitioner in New Delhi with her own practice until she retired 3 years ago. He is also survived by his 2 children, both of whom are academic physicians. His son, Dr Manish Tandon, is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Tufts University Medical Center, a Clinical Instructor at Harvard Medical School, and a gastroenterologist at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center. His daughter, Dr Richa Tandon, is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine and the Division Chief of Infectious Diseases at Roger Williams Medical Center in Rhode Island.

Dr Rakesh Tandon will be missed dearly by his friends, colleagues, students, and family. His legacy and contributions to the field of gastroenterology will last forever.

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