



Book review: Pioneers of Medical Sciences & Their Inspiring Achievements

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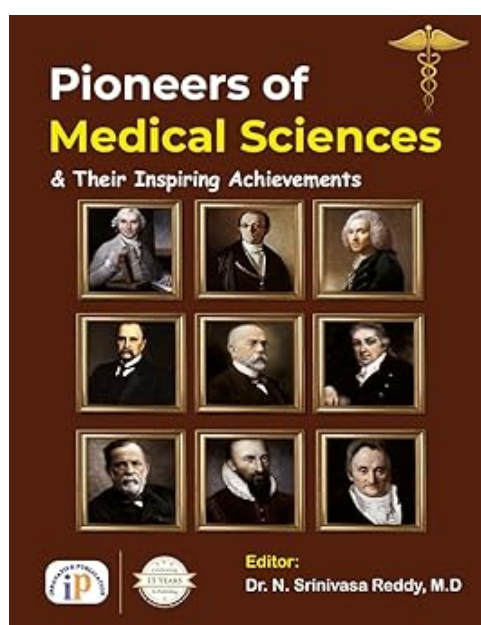
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Pioneers of Medical Sciences & Their Inspiring Achievements

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Author: Dr. N. Srinivasa Reddy, MD
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Dr. NS Reddy recently published this remarkable book on the Pioneers of Medical Sciences. Amidst the multitude of books released each year, this one stands out for the uniqueness of its theme. It offers a concise yet insightful overview of the founders of various branches of medicine and their invaluable contributions to the advancement of medical science.

In the preface, Dr. Reddy notes that the inspiration for writing this book arose from his

incidental readings of the biographies of two former faculty members of Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam: Dr. Danda Venkata Subba Reddy and Dr. Pudipeddy Kutumbaiah. Both were pioneers in the field of the history of medicine, and their legacies inspired Dr. Reddy to chronicle the lives of other medical practitioners who have transformed the course of medical practice.

The book covers a broad spectrum of specialties, and includes disciplines in basic

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medical sciences, medical and surgical specialties, 37 areas in miscellaneous medical sciences, and 15 interdisciplinary fields. Notably, Dr. Reddy explores various ancillary branches within the medical and health humanities, such as narrative medicine, graphic medicine, medical illustration, and medical art. He also touches upon niche areas like travel medicine, medical sociology, medical anthropology, sex reassignment surgery, wilderness medicine, and adventure medicine. The appendices add further value by highlighting unique topics such as doctors with disabilities who inspired the world, renowned medical authors, and pioneering women in medicine.

While the book discusses the lives of several pioneers who happen to be women, their contributions to the development of narrative medicine was especially insightful. It opened our eyes to the concept of the healer's art, as practiced by Rachel Naomi Remen, which offers a comprehensive and compassionate approach to illness. This reminded us of Hutchison's aphorism in *The Physician's Prayer* about "not treating patients as cases" and the need for a humanistic way of caring for patients. At the same time, the concept of 'narrative competence', introduced by Rita Charon, also deeply resonated with us, given that narrative medicine training is seen to foster empathy and reflection in medical students.

We were fascinated to learn from this book that John Everett Park, the author of the renowned textbook on social and preventive medicine, has roots in Andhra Pradesh, India, and is an alumnus of Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam. At the same time, we were deeply moved to discover that Dr. BD Chaurasia, Professor of Anatomy, sold his cyclostyled notes to students for a mere ten rupees, as typesetting and printing were prohibitively expensive at the time. In honour of his contributions, his birthday (October 1st) is observed as Medical Teachers' Day every year in Madhya Pradesh, India. While we often look abroad for prominent medical authors, it is heartening to recognize the remarkable

contributions of Indian medical authors who have played a significant role in shaping medical education.

From Semmelweis's contributions to aseptic surgery to William Morton's public demonstration of ether anaesthesia, the author has covered a vast expanse of the medical landscape. The author includes the heartbreaking account of Dr. Subhash Mukherjee (1931–1981), the Indian physician and reproductive biologist who successfully performed in vitro fertilisation (IVF) resulting in the birth of the world's second test-tube baby; but yet tragically ended his life because he faced scepticism and obstacles from the Governments of West Bengal and India. This gives an angle into the difficulties that scientific advancements in medical care face in their infancy.

The book also introduces readers to the world of graphic novels in medicine, such as *The Bad Doctor* and *The Lady Doctor* by Dr. Ian Williams, a founding member of the Graphic Medicine International Collective. The intersection of comics and healthcare offers a unique perspective that induces us to reflect on the complexities of illness and caregiving. By the same token, the section on medical and health humanities introduces the *What's Up With Everyone?* campaign, launched by Paul Crawford, and the book *The Quest for Health Reform: A Satirical History* by Theodore M. Brown. As the author takes us through the lives of these doyens, he emphasizes that training in the arts and social sciences can help medical doctors become leaders in providing holistic care to their patients.

Another area that particularly appealed to us was the section on the pioneers of medical illustration, which presents the lives and contributions of figures ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Frank Henry Netter. In an age where image-generating Artificial Intelligence like DALL-E, and an abundance of digital images are readily available, the skill and dedication of these artists in presenting complex medical concepts to students of the

yester years in the best possible way, using just two dimensions, remains truly admirable.

Learning about the personal lives of some of the greatest contributors to medicine, especially those who overcame poverty, has been truly inspiring. One such example is Vivien Thomas, whose story, as presented by the author, is both shocking and awe-inspiring. Despite never attending medical school, Thomas made groundbreaking contributions to the development of the Blalock-Thomas-Taussig shunt, used to treat infants with congenital heart disease. His expertise was so profound that he even instructed cardiothoracic surgeons at Johns Hopkins University, shaping the future of cardiac surgery.

Similarly, the story of Dr. Mary Verghese from India is equally remarkable. Following a devastating road accident that left her paralyzed below the waist, she was treated by Dr. Paul Brand, who later became her mentor. With unwavering determination, she went on to become the first head of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Christian Medical College, Vellore, pioneering advancements in physiotherapy and rehabilitation medicine. Her autobiography, *Take My Hand: The Remarkable Story of Dr. Mary Verghese*, continues to inspire generations of physiatrists and medical

professionals worldwide.

Although this book is a commendable compilation of many pioneers and their contributions to the field of medical sciences, there are a few shortcomings that warrant mention. There are instances of mismatched photographs of the pioneers, along with few typographical and grammatical errors. In some sections, the narrative lacks chronological consistency. Moreover, the information provided about certain pioneers is overly brief and could have been more detailed.

That notwithstanding, this book by Dr. NS Reddy is not only of academic interest but also valuable for anyone intrigued by the history and evolution of medical science as a discipline. It serves as an excellent resource for medical educators, particularly for setting the context during lectures and delivering components of the AETCOM (Attitude, Ethics, and Communication) curriculum. Additionally, it is highly relevant for designing induction programs for undergraduate medical students. This book is a treasure trove for enthusiasts of medical history and stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of historical inquiry. In every era, there are individuals who remain deeply interested in history—and rightly so, for understanding the past is essential to shaping the future.