



Dear IAPA Members,

It is with mixed feelings of affection, respect and sadness that I write this tribute to my mentor and guru, Dr. Prakash N. Desai, one of the founding members of the IAPA.

Prakash N. Desai, M.D. passed away on January 5, 2015 at the age of 74 years from complications of mouth and throat cancer. He died peacefully at University of Illinois at Chicago Hospital surrounded by his wife, Alice, two daughters, Reshma and Natasha and granddaughter, Sophia. Dr. Desai was born in Baroda, India on February 18, 1940 as the fourth of ten children born to the late Navinkant and Valima Desai. From an early age, he engaged many with his dynamic personality, exceptional intellect and passion for humanity. He excelled in academics and debate.

He graduated from Baroda Medical School at the young age of 20. He moved to the US in 1965, around age 25 to pursue higher studies. As a young, charismatic immigrant he soon developed a wide circle of friends, both fellow immigrants and native born Indians and Americans.

He completed his psychiatry residency at Northwestern University. His professional career began at the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute which soon led him to work at the Illinois Department of Mental Health (DMH) as the 'Region Two Administrator' from 1973-1978. As one who believed in public psychiatry, he then worked at the West Side Veterans Health Care facility (now Jesse Brown VA) for 26 years, the first 16 as the Chief of Psychiatry and the next ten as Chief of Staff. A visionary leader, he played a key role in the merger of the Lakeside VA and Westside VA medical centers to provide the best integrated care for the veterans in inner city Chicago. During this time he had a professorial appointment at the University of Illinois at Chicago where he worked the last five years on a full time basis. He also served as the Associate Dean for the University of Illinois Hospital, Chicago.

His academic interests were in the areas of cross cultural psychiatry, ancient Hindu texts and mental health among the Indians. He was a prolific writer. He wrote extensively about psychological effects of immigrants and psychotherapy of immigrants. He published two books: *Health and Medicine in the Hindu Tradition* (Crossroads, New York, NY. '89) and *Triumph and Tragedy: Psychohistorical Decisions of Mahatma Gandhi* with Hyman Muslin as his co-author (Haranand, New

Delhi, India. '98). He has also published several book chapters, and over a dozen papers in professional journals.

He was actively involved in the governance of the American Psychiatric Association for more than twenty years ending up as the Speaker of its Assembly, the house of delegates of its over 70 branches. He was the first Asian Indian to hold this office.

He has received numerous awards for his work among which are the Oscar Pfeister award (in recognition of his work on Religion and Psychiatry and the George Tarjan award (given annually to an International Medical Graduate of distinction), both from the American Psychiatric Association and the Bruce Boyer Award (for the paper 'Selfhood and Context: Some Indian Solutions') from the American Society for Psychological anthropology.

As one of the founding members of the Indo American Psychiatric Association [IAPA] he provided guidance during the early phases of its inception. The IAPA honored him with the Distinguished Service Award in 2004. He often presented at the IAPA annual convention either as a discussant or a participant at its scientific sessions. He was a captivating speaker and enthralled the audience with his quick wit and humor.

All these accomplishments only complement his kind and generous spirit that served as a touchstone for so many. Countless friends and family consulted him for guidance in personal and professional issues. He genuinely cared, listened and advised those who sought him out. Such wisdom, generosity, wit and joy are found in but a rare few.

Dr Desai touched us and we are better for it. As my mentor for over twenty years, I learned how to be a fair and visionary leader and an inspiring mentor.

As friends for over thirty years, we shared our common interests in Hindi literature, old Hindi movie songs and Urdu ghazals.

I shall miss him deeply.

Surinder Sucha Nand M.D.