



Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim
MB, FCCP, FRCP (London), FRCP (Glasgow)

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(December 31, 1911 - September 6, 1989)

PROF. MOHAMMAD IBRAHIM was an institution in himself. He founded numerous institutions like Diabetic Association of Pakistan as well as Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders (BIRDEM), Bangladesh Institute of Research in Training in Applied Nutrition (BIRTAN). His contributions in the field of medicine in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh in medicine in general and diabetes in particular are indeed commendable.

As a physician and as a teacher he always laid tremendous emphasis on punctuality, discipline and devotion to duty, practice rather than precept throughout his life. His leadership qualities enabled him to gather around him a band of honest and hard working personnel who helped him in his multidisciplinary institution. His untiring and pioneering work for over three decades in the field of medicine and social work earned him unique reputation, both at home and abroad not only as an expert on diabetes but also as a social worker whose dedication and compassion are widely known and appreciated. Although he established numerous institutions during his professional career but BIRDEM provides a model for establishment of a community oriented diabetes control and prevention centres in Asia and Africa for which he will always be remembered. BIRDEM is the only institution in Asia designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre on diabetes, endocrine and metabolic disorders. There are four such centres in the world.

Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim was born on 31st December 1911 at Murshidabad in West Bengal. He graduated from Calcutta Medical College in 1938. From 1938-45 he worked as House Physician, Emergency Officer, Senior Demonstrator of Practical Pharmacy at Calcutta Medical College and Hospital. He was later appointed as Resident Physician at Calcutta Medical College Hospital where he served from 1945-47. He was then transferred as Civil Surgeon of Chittagong District, Superintendent of General Hospital and Teacher of Medicine at Chittagong Medical School and Hospital where he served till 1948 when he was selected for postgraduate studies in UK and earned MRCP in 1950.¹

On his return he was appointed additional Physician, Professor of Clinical Medicine and Prof. of Medicine Dhaka Medical College (1950-62). He then took charge as Principal and Prof. of Medicine at Sir Salimullah Medical College Dhaka where he served from 1962-64. On the death of Prof. Kasim, Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim was transferred to West Pakistan and appointed as Prof. of Medicine at JPMC. He founded the Diabetic Association of Pakistan in Dhaka in 1956 and remained a moving spirit behind all its activities.

Dr. Ibrahim's outstanding contribution lies in his untiring efforts, spread over more than three decades to generate awareness and interest in diabetes and its allied diseases in Pakistan and after 1971 when East Pakistan separated and became an independent country Bangladesh. He created awareness not only among the diabetics, their families, high risk individual but also health care personnel in particular to provide a comprehensive diabetes health care delivery service and system, including therapy, education, training, research and rehabilitation.

NUTRITION SURVEY

He studied the problem of nutrition as early as 1958. He conducted a nutrition survey which revealed that even the children of educated and well to do families of Dhaka were not taking enough calories which was essential for normal mental growth, physical initiative and drive. Recognizing the gravity

of the situation, he initiated a nutrition project at Jurian Village in Dhaka which culminated in the establishment of an institution called Bangladesh Institute of Research and Training in Applied Nutrition (BIRATAN). This project demonstrated that given proper knowledge and motivation, the community can substantially improved the level of nutrition health and quality of life by more effective agricultural practices. The institution has now developed into a national centre for training of grass root level workers.²

Through his work on diabetes, Dr. Ibrahim foresaw the special role which doctors should play in bestowing greater attention on genetic, degenerative and other non-communicable diseases. The incidence and prevalence of these disease were bound to assume greater urgency and importance with the increase in life expectancy once the communicable diseases were controlled. These changing conditions and pattern of diseases demanded comprehensive care for which patient counseling and rehabilitation were as important as therapy itself. This led him to emphasize the social significance of the medical profession as distinct from his professional consideration, the need for community orientation, support for prevention and care of diseases. He always avoided publicity, a rare quality from men engaged in public service. Self promotion was a virtue that was unknown to Prof. Ibrahim.

BIRDEM

Dr. Ibrahim has been an outstanding administrator, astute disciplinarian and devoted social worker throughout his life. But he received national and international recognition for establishing Diabetic Association first in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh which eventually led to the establishment of BIRDEM at Dhaka. Starting in a small tin-shed at Segum Bagicha in 1956 as Diabetic Association of Pakistan with facilities for thirty nine indoor patients, BIRDEM is now a large complex with numerous most modern buildings in Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, one three storeyed and the other seven storeyed. Another fourteen storey

building has now been constructed at Shahbagh in Dhaka. This institution was designated as WHO Collaborating Centre for developing community oriented services, education, training and research for prevention and control of diabetes in 1982. Here free medical care with strict follow-up for all patients is provided irrespective of social, educational and economic status. BIRDEM researchers are busy in conducting fundamental, applied and innovative research. Besides running a big hospital in Dhaka, BIRDEM also manages numerous diabetic centers all over Bangladesh. BIRDEM's long journey from Segun Bagicha to Shahbagh Avenue is a tale of devotion and dedication of one individual and this man happens to be the father figure of Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim.³

BIRDEM now has over 650 beds with some VIP-beds, some semi-private rooms. Over hundred beds are reserved for poor patients who are treated free. A new 500-bed state of the art teaching hospital is also nearing completion. BIRDEM has three thousand five hundred employees and its annual budget is two hundred crore Takas.⁴ The institute has a central computerized record of lacs of registered diabetic patients. In the OPD about four thousand patients come daily at BIRDEM and its affiliated hospitals, clinics daily, hundreds of new cases are diagnosed every day. The institute spends crores of Takas annually on providing free OPD consultation and investigation to diabetic patients. Poor patients are also provided Insulin free of cost worth twenty five crore Takkas every year.⁴ BIRDEM has a Metabolism, Endocrine and Surgical Divisions. It has a very well equipped imaging department with facilities of CT scan as well which was installed on August 12, 1989. The institute's moto is that a diabetic patient shall not die untreated, unfed or unemployed even if poor. Every year one medical officer and one laboratory technician from all the four hundred sixty Thana Health Complexes in Bangladesh is provided a weeks training at BIRDEM to look after the diabetic patients. BIRDEM has an excellent library with CD Rom facility. A scientific journal is published regularly for the last many years. A corner in the library belongs to late Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim where his

clothes, briefcase, shields and certificates are preserved.⁵

Over the years BIRDEM has now developed into a huge medical complex with numerous institutions offering state of the art facilities in different disciplines of medicine.⁴ These are as under:

1. BIRDEM
2. Rehabilitation and Vocational Training Center
3. National Healthcare Network
4. Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital and Research Institute
5. Ibrahim Medical College established in 2002.
6. Healthcare Development Project
7. Preventive Foot Care
8. Distance Learning Project
9. Bangladesh Institute of Health Sciences
10. Primary Prevention of Diabetes Mellitus.

Prof. Ibrahim carried very special feeling for the suffering and the needs of diabetic patients not only in Asia but also the countries he visited. He tried to help, support and to encourage those engaged in diabetic care and the most difficult situations were a challenge for him in finding a solution. In the shape of BIRDEM he was successful in creating one of the best organized health and social care services for the diabetic patients in one of the least developed countries of the world.³

BIRDEM ACADEMY

Yet another achievement of Dr. Ibrahim was the development of specific manpower for all medical colleges and peripheral institutions of health by creating BIRDEM Academy under postgraduate Faculty of Dhaka University. The Academy provides courses leading to degrees and diplomas like MD, Ph.D., M.Phil besides Diploma in diabetes, endocrinology and metabolic disorders (DEM). He was also instrumental in creating awareness among the planners, policy makers, medical and scientific community and society in general towards the emerging problem of chronic life long diseases like diabetes, hypertension,

coronary heart disease. He persistently endeavoured to change the educational pattern and concept of medical practice from episodic to an anticipatory and comprehensive one from clinical to preventive and promotive so as to meet the challenge of modern times with contemporary technology through “example rather than precept”.

When College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan was established in 1962, Prof. Ibrahim was one of the nine founder fellows selected from the then East Pakistan. The total number of founder fellows were forty five.⁶ And when Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons was established with Presidential order No. 63 dated June 6th on 1972, its first AGM was held on December 22nd 1972 when a twenty member council was elected. Prof. Ibrahim was one of them. In this meeting all fellows of CPSP were also made founder fellows of the BCPS.⁶

Prof. S. M. Rab an eminent physician, a former President of College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan recalls that “I met Prof. Ibrahim for the first time when I was a second year student at Dhaka Medical College. In those days there were only two physicians with MRCP degrees i.e. Dr. A.K.M. Abdul Wahid who later became Principal of Khyber Medical College and Dr. Nawab Ali. Dr. Shamsuddin and Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim both of whom hailed from East Pakistan were sent on deputation and they did their MRCP from London. At the time of partition, there were just twelve Muslim doctors with MBBS degree who were enlisted as members of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council from East Pakistan. Prof. Nurul Islam and myself (Prof. S.M. Rab) were the other two physicians who later obtained MRCP from London.

After Calcutta riots in 1951, I saw Prof. Ibrahim’s humanitarian and social consciousness. After attending our duties in the Wards, he often used to take us to Ganderia to see the refugees. He was a Professor of Clinical Medicine and also my teacher as well as examiner in 1952. When he joined Sir Salimullah Medical College as Principal and Prof. of Medicine, I was Prof. of Clinical Medicine. When he was transferred to Dhaka Medical College, I replaced him as Prof. of Medicine at Sir Salimullah Medical

College. Again it was I who replaced him as Prof. of Medicine at Dhaka Medical College and later as Prof. of Medicine at JPMC when Prof. Ibrahim opted to settle in Bangladesh.

Prof. Ibrahim was very active socially. Since he had studied at Calcutta Medical College, he knew all those who later opted for Pakistan and settled in East Pakistan. He used those contacts successfully for the projects which he initiated may it be the Diabetic Association of Pakistan or creation of medical units in various medical colleges. In those days, Prof. Ibrahim and Dr. Shamsuddin were the two noted physicians of Dhaka city in East Pakistan and they were the eyes and ears of Government and both of them utilized their contact exceptionally well.

Prof. Ibrahim had a very modest beginning in West Bengal. His success story is entirely that of a self made man. He had an excellent ability to make friends and he capitalized on this ability through extensive traveling for which he was very fond of. And attending many conferences enabled him to make many friends internationally and through that he put himself, Pakistan and later Bangladesh on the World Map in the field of diabetes through his tireless efforts.

In the early part of 60s, his closeness to politicians and perhaps an insight into the political future of united Pakistan, allowed him to concentrate more on the future of medicine in Bangladesh perhaps at the expense of what he should have done at the JPMC where he was head of the department of medicine, Director of this institution besides Chairman of Pakistan Medical Research Council. He was a good clinician as far as a conceptual approach towards day to day medicine is concerned. He was the physician with overall command of a large range of diseases which are within every day practice but not without limitations. In those days what ever was said by the teacher was accepted and students did not dare ask questions whereas now the students can make the teacher's life a hell if he fails to mention some relevant points. Those who followed him in the Diabetic Association of Pakistan were neither the heavy weights nor they had the access to the power corridors, that is why no institution like BIRDEM came up in Pakistan.”

During the 1971 crisis which resulted in the split of Pakistan, Prof. Ibrahim had gone overseas to attend a meeting. He never came back to Pakistan and instead decided to return to an independent Bangladesh.

OTHER IMPORTANT ASSIGNMENTS

Apart from founding the Diabetic Association of Pakistan, Prof. Ibrahim served as Chairman of PMRC 1969-71, Chairman of Pakistan National Science Council from 1969-70. He served as Director of Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center at Karachi from 1964-71. Other important posts which he held included President, Bangladesh Association of Scientists and Scientific Profession. In 1975, he was appointed Advisor to the President of Bangladesh in charge of Ministry of Health and Population Control, Labour Manpower and Social Welfare where he served till 1977. In 1981 he was elected Vice-President of Bangladesh Academy of Science and served as President of Bangladesh College of Physicians and surgeons from 1976-81. Ever since his retirement, he devoted fully to the task of developing and promoting healthcare, medical education, medical research specially in the field of comprehensive diabetic care, rehabilitation and nutrition.

Prof. Ibrahim also served as President of Institute of Geriatric Medicine and Research (BIGMR). He was honoured by the Government of Bangladesh by making him the First National Professor in 1984. He was member of executive committee of International Federation of Aging, London 1982 and President of Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine of Bangladesh in 1978. In 1982 he was made member of National Council of Science and Technology of Bangladesh and visiting Professor of Clinical Biochemistry and Nutrition at University of Dhaka in 1981. He also served as Member of the Academic Council of Dhaka University. Quranic School Society of Dhaka honoured him with its membership in appreciation for his distinguished services to the Nation. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh also honoured him with his membership in 1984.

Honours and Awards

Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim is recipient of numerous honours and awards from innumerable societies, associations, government and non-governmental bodies. He became a Fellow of American College of Chest Physicians (FCCP) in 1950, founder fellow of CPSP in 1962, Senate Member of Dhaka University in 1981, Member of Board of Management of International Diabetes Federation from 1982-84. Government of Pakistan conferred on him Sitara-e-Khidmat in 1963.

He received the Independence Day Award from Government of Bangladesh during 1979, Begum Zeb Unnessa and Qaazi Mahbubullah Public Welfare Trust honoured him with the Gold Medal for his contribution to medical science again in 1981. He became an executive committee member of International Federation of Aging in 1983 and received Mahbub Ali Khan Memorial Award Gold Medal for contribution to medical and social sciences. Comilla Foundation honoured him with a Gold Medal in 1986 while he was the proud recipient of Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Gold Medal in 1987 and Moulana Akram Khan Memorial Gold Medal in 1991. Lions Club International also honoured him with its Silver Jubilee Award in 1983 for his outstanding humanitarian Services.

PUBLICATIONS

Prof. Ibrahim has over two dozen publications published in various reputed medical journals including BMJ and Lancet to his credit. Most of his work has been in the field of Diabetes besides Rheumatic Heart Disease. He used to be a regular speaker at the International Diabetes Federation meetings held in different parts of the world.

LAST JOURNEY

Professor Ibrahim died of cardiac arrest on September 6, 1989 at the age of seventy eight years. He had a pacemaker at the Institute of Cardiovascular Disease at Suharwardy Hospital in 1985 which was later replaced with a demand pacemaker in London. He had returned a day earlier from London where

he had gone for a medical check-up. He was suffering from heart disease for a long time but was found to be quite comfortable after his return to Dhaka. He left behind his wife Sakina Ibrahim a house wife, two sons and three daughters i.e. Dr. Anwar Hossain, Mr. Fazl-ul-Kabir Ahmad Hossain, late Dr. Abu Tayyeb who died in a traffic accident in California, USA in 1983. Dr. Hajera Mehtab who is now chairperson BIRDEM Board of Management, Dr. Kishwar Azad and Mrs. Fatema Hossain. His eldest son Dr. Anwar is a consultant in rheumatology and another son F. K. Hossain is Director of Rehabilitation Project of BIRDEM in Jurian. Dhaka Medical College remained closed on September 7, 1989 as a mark of respect to Dr. Ibrahim. His Namaz-e-Janaza was offered at Bait-ul-Mukarram National Mosque after Juma Prayers. His body was kept in BIRDEM from 9:00 AM to 12:00 AM to facilitate the members of the public to have the last glimpse and pay respects to the eminent physician.²

Although Prof. Ibrahim worked very hard, he got up early in the morning. After offering Fajar prayers, he used to start his regular work schedule by visiting the diabetes centre at Gorain at the outskirts of Dhaka which functions meticulously. BIRDEM is his baby and his advice to BIRDEM people was that “never keep the hospital closed because that would mean trouble for the patients”. It was on his instructions that neither BIRDEM nor any diabetic centres were closed even for an hour after his death. He had said. “You must not close the hospital even for an hour, after his death. My death would shock you but if you keep the hospital closed, the patients would suffer, if the hospitals remain closed my soul will suffer”.³

Prof. M. Sultan Farooqui, another former President of CPSP who served under him at JPMC, recalls that “he was one of the most dedicated healthcare professionals. He had a lot of visions even in those days. Whenever he taught, he always felt that instead of looking at what has happened, always do something new. Think of future and not the past. He struggled hard to establish Diabetic Association of Pakistan which also

made its humble beginning in West Pakistan with a Diabetic Clinic on Shakra-e-Faisal. The amount of care he used to take with the cleanliness in the ward, equipment was enormous. He was particularly very careful that equipment should be used and maintained properly. The laboratory diagnostic service at the JPMC even in those days were remarkable. He was quite punctual in evening rounds and he could come to the ward any time. He was not much interested in private practice. Morning meetings in the ward used to be a routine. Every admission and emergency during the last twenty four hours used to be discussed and presented by the Postgraduates. RMOs would present the cases. He wished and made sure that all the faculty members, PGs and House Officers should be present in the morning meeting. If anyone didn't attend the meeting for two consecutive days, he will ring him up at home to enquire if everything was OK saying I didn't see you in the morning meeting. This used to be his style. Yet another rare quality Prof. Ibrahim had, was that he always promoted his No. 2 and wanted to leave his successors, hence, he encouraged his juniors. He was not at all scared of them. He wished to impart them all the knowledge he had that is why, he left behind an internationally renowned institution like BIRDEM in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which he so carefully nurtured. If we don't have an institution like BIRDEEM in Pakistan, it is because we could not produce a man of Prof. Ibrahim's caliber".

Prof. Nur-ul-Islam, another noted physician and founder of the first private medical university, (USTC) University of Science and Technology in Chittagong Bangladesh, and National Professor of Bangladesh paid rich tributes to late Dr. Ibrahim while delivering the Ibrahim Memorial lecture. Prof. Ibrahim, he opined, reached the pinnacle of glory in his life.⁷ He was the father of Medicine in Bangladesh and his contributions have been nothing less than phenomenal in the field of diabetes. It is recognized all over the world and its lasting example stands erect in Bangladesh as well as in Pakistan. We lost him and yet he was a successful and satisfied man when he left this world.

He was father of anti-diabetic movement in Bangladesh. He often used to say that three 'Ds' are essential for the control of diabetes. These are Diet, Drugs and Discipline. But discipline is the keyword for the success while other two are unavoidable essential.⁸

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Dr. Hajera Mathab, BIRDEM, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. Prof. S.M. Rab, Former President of CPSP Karachi.
3. Prof. Nur-ul-Islam, National Professor of Bangladesh.
4. Prof. M. Sultan Farooqui, Former President of CPSP, Karachi.

Important Points

1. Prof. Ibrahim established Diabetic Association of Paksitan and later Bangladesh Diabetic Association in 1957.
2. BIRDEM which he established has now developed into a huge medical complex with numerous state of the art institutons in different disciplines, has a university and more than one affiliated medical colleges.
3. BIRDEM is known as the World's biggest hospital for diabetes care.
4. Prof. Ibrahim believed that no more diabetic patient will die without treatment.
5. On the death of Prof. Kasim, Prof. Ibrahim was transferred to West Pakistan and appointed at Prof. of Medicine at JPMC Karachi where he also served as its Director before leaving for Bangladesh in 1971.
6. He was one of the nine founder fellows of CPSP from East Pakistan and later became founder fellow of Bangladesh College of Physicians & Surgeons when it was established on December 22nd, 1972.