

Obituary

Professor Harbans Singh Randhawa (1933-2020)



Professor Harbans Singh Randhawa
(5 October 1933-11 November 2020)

It is with a great sense of grief for me to inform fellow mycologists that Prof. Harbans Singh Randhawa, Retired Professor and Head, Medical Mycology Unit, Department of Microbiology (formerly designated as Department of Medical Mycology), ex-Director of Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute (VPCI) (1991-1998) and INSA Emeritus Scientist passed away on November 11, 2020. He is regarded as the doyen of medical mycology in India. Prof. Randhawa was born on October 5, 1933 in village Bhangali Kalan, District Amritsar, Punjab. He completed his MSc Thesis (1956) on the nutritional requirements of a fungal pathogen *Colletotrichum capsici*, the etiologic agent of die-back disease of chillies, under the tutelage of Prof. K.S. Thind, an eminent fungal taxonomist. His association with VPCI dates back to January 1957 when he joined as Assistant Research Officer (mycologist) under founder Director, the late Prof. Raman Viswanathan in an ICMR-financed comprehensive research project on bagassosis. He was given additional responsibility to organise a clinical mycology laboratory support of the late Dr Hans F. Smetana, a renowned visiting pathologist from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington, USA, the late Lt Col A.J.H. de Monte, Assistant Director and Head, Department of Bacteriology (subsequently renamed Microbiology, and Dr H.D. Tandon, Head, Department of Pathology. Following the establishment of a Department of Medical Mycology in 1959, Randhawa was appointed on its faculty as a Junior Research Officer. Later joined by Dr R.S. Sandhu, as Senior Research Officer. While in service, he was awarded PhD degree by the University of Delhi in 1964 for the thesis entitled, "Studies on the Pathogenic

Fungus Flora of Man in India with special reference to Geophilic Dermatophytes and Related Keratinophilic Fungi". In 1968, he was appointed as Senior Research Officer (later re-designated as Reader with introduction of UGC pay scales), Professor of Medical Mycology in 1980 and Director in 1991 succeeding Prof. Autar Singh Paintal, a globally renowned medical scientist who made pioneering discoveries in the area of neurosciences and respiratory sciences, and was the first Indian physiologist to become the Fellow of the Royal Society, London.

Prof. Randhawa was awarded several coveted international research fellowships, such as the Nuffield Foundation Fellowship (UK), 1963-64; Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship (Germany), 1970-71; Fulbright Fellowship (USA), 1980. He did collaborative research work with a number of leading international research centres, such as Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Brompton Hospital, London (UK); Robert Koch Institute, Berlin (Germany); Centres for Disease Control (CDC), Atlanta (USA) and Central Bureauvoor Schimmel cultures, Baarn, Netherlands. He is recipient of a number of national and international awards/honours, notably Shome Memorial Oration Award, Mycological Society of India, 1981; Warner-NCCP (I) Chest Oration Award, 1983; the ISHAM-Lucille Georg Award of the International Society for Human and Animal Mycology, bestowed on him in Adelaide, Australia, 1994, and the Raman Viswanathan Memorial Oration, NCCP(I), 1996. Prof. Randhawa served as Vice-President of the International Society for Human and Animal Mycology for 3 years (1985-88). He was Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy, Founder

Fellow, National College of Chest Physicians (India) and a Fellow of the Indian College of Allergy and Applied Immunology. For nearly four decades, he served on the Editorial Board of *Medical Mycology* (formerly *Sabouraudia*/ "Journal of Medical and Veterinary Mycology"), an official periodical of ISHAM. He was also an Editorial Advisory Board member/Editor of the *Mycoses* (formerly *Mykosen*), a monthly periodical of German-speaking Mycological Society, and an Editor of the *Indian Journal of Chest Diseases and Allied Sciences*. Besides, he served as member of many important Advisory Committees, such as Review Group on International Nomenclature of Diseases (1980-81) of the WHO, International Union of Microbiological Societies 2000-003, and Infectious Disease Biology Task Force, Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, for the period 2005-2008.

During Prof. Randhawa's five and a half decades of dedicated service in VPCI, his research studies focused on the etiopathogenesis of invasive and hypersensitivity diseases of the respiratory tract due to fungi and *actinomycetes* with a major interest in epidemiology, development of novel laboratory diagnostic techniques, and immunodiagnosis of respiratory and systemic mycoses. Recognising the significant contributions of Prof. Randhawa and his associates, an ICMR-funded National Reference Centre for Respiratory Mycoses was established in 1985 in the Department of Medical Mycology at VPCI. He is globally known for the discovery of *Candida viswanathii* and several other fungi of clinical interest. Prof. Randhawa has mentored 19 PhD, 9 MD/MS/MPH research scholars, many of whom have established themselves as distinguished researchers and teachers in Medical Mycology/Microbiology. He has over 180 publications, including critical reviews and editorials in leading scientific

journals, with many of these widely cited in standard textbooks and monographs of Medical Mycology/Microbiology and chest diseases. The XIII Congress of the International Society for Human and Animal Mycology (ISHAM), held at Salsamaggiore Terme, Parma, Italy, 1997, elected Prof. Randhawa as one of its Honorary Members. More recently, a new environmental fungus *Cryptococcus randhawai*, was named after him in view of his significant mycological contributions. Besides, in order to commemorate his outstanding services to the Institute, an annual oration was started in his honour in 2015. Following his retirement as Director of VPCI in October 1998, he had continued his active engagement in research in the Institute as an Honorary Scientist of INSA, New Delhi. He will be greatly missed by the fraternity of medical mycologists for his high moral values and principles.

Professor Randhawa's younger son, Prof. Valinderjeet Randhawa is employed as Professor of Microbiology in Lady Harding Medical College, New Delhi (e-mail: vsramdh@gmail.com), and the elder son, Prof Parmjeet Randhawa is a Professor of Pathology in the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, Pittsburgh, PA, USA (e-mail: randhawapa@upmc.edu). His wife expired in 2012. Besides being an academician, imbued with scientific integrity, simplicity, and nobility, Prof Randhawa was a very compassionate person and a source of inspiration for his several relations including his cousins, nephews and nieces settled in India, UK, Australia and USA.

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