

Prof Shanmugam Kameswaran (1923-2021)

BY NIRMAL KUMAR AND GERRY O'DONOGHUE

Professor Shanmugam Kameswaran was born in 1923 and did his MBBS and MS at Madras Medical College, India, under PV Cheriau who later became the Governor of Maharashtra, India. He worked as his assistant and left for the UK in 1950s along with his wife, Dr Lalitha Kameswaran, who went on to do her PhD at the University of London. He had a very close association with his colleagues in the UK and was trained at the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital, Gray's Inn Road, under Prof Maxwell Ellis in the 1950s. He was a friend and compatriot of eminent ENT surgeons in the UK, such as Sir DFN Harrison and John Ballantyne before returning to India and establishing a specialist unit and upgraded Institute of Otorhinolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery (ORL-HNS) in Madras Medical College. His textbook on ENT disorders in the tropics was an authoritative work on the subject and the only one at that time. He himself had done significant work on rhinosporidiosis, a tropical fungal disease which led to a PhD; the first by an Indian otolaryngologist. He was passionate about the subject and felt that with the world shrinking, tropical diseases were no longer the domain of the tropics, a view vindicated by the recent pandemic. He was awarded the Padma Shri Award, the third highest civilian award in India, and Dr BC Roy Award, the highest award for a doctor, given by the President of India. He was a consultant for the WHO, as well as being the longest serving Director of the Institute of Otorhinolaryngology at Madras Medical College until his retirement. His son, Prof Mohan Kameswaran, followed in his footsteps, and they are the only father-son duo in the history of the country to have both



been honoured with the Padma Shri and BC Roy awards. Prof Mohan Kameswaran established in 1996 the Madras ENT Research Foundation (MERF) under the guidance of his father, and this has become a premier institute for tertiary ENT care in India. The cochlear implant programme, started in 1997, was perhaps one of the first in India (and South Asia). The first auditory brain stem implant (ABI) was performed in 2005, and the first paediatric ABI in 2006 - the first in South and Southeast Asia. MERF has several firsts in other aspects of ENT and its allied specialties.

Prof S Kameswaran was a great teacher and mentored several generations of otolaryngologists in India. He was also a great humanitarian who touched the lives of millions of his fellow Indians in a long career spanning over 50 years. He was instrumental in getting the government

of the day to come up with several welfare projects for the hearing challenged and enabling people from all socio-economic groups to benefit from hearing rehabilitation. He was the perfect bridge between UK and Indian otolaryngologists for many years and encouraged Indian surgeons to develop strong bonds with their counterparts in the UK. He was proud of his FRCS, Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh, and of the international standards and proud traditions of the oldest surgical college in the world. He was afforded full state honours by the government and laid to rest in his hometown, Chennai, India. Many otolaryngologists in India and around the world owe their interest in otolaryngology to him. He served as the Patron of Madras ENT Research Foundation and Emeritus Professor at the Medical University until his death.

“He himself had done significant work on rhinosporidiosis, a tropical fungal disease which led to a PhD; the first by an Indian otolaryngologist”



Prof Gerry O'Donoghue, BACO Master.

Professor S Kameswaran was the undisputed ‘gentle giant’ of Indian otolaryngology and one of the most engaging and inspirational of colleagues. He was a staunch humanitarian figure, was never judgemental and was totally devoid of any self-interest. He was a brilliant raconteur who enjoyed regaling his colleagues with many amusing anecdotes that marked his illustrious career. He was a committed family man and was hugely proud of their many achievements, especially those of his son, Mohan, who followed with trepidation in his footsteps. He was a gentleman, scholar and surgeon and will be greatly missed.

