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## *Presidential Address*

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### **XXXI National Conference of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics February 10, 1994 New Delhi**

#### **Uday Bodhankar**

Honorable chief guest, guests of honor, distinguished dignitaries on the dias, guest speakers, delegates from India and abroad, respected teachers, past presidents of IAP, members of APSSEAR, MCI, WHO, UNICEF, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, organizers of the 8th Asian Congress of Pediatrics and XXXI National Conference of IAP, fellow delegates, media persons, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

At the outset, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to all the members of IAP for reposing their confidence and electing me to the coveted post of President of IAP. I consider it a great privilege and honor and with infinite humility and pride, I stand before you today to deliver the XXXI Presidential Address.

We all are aware of the rich heritage of IAP presidents having outstanding calibre. However, I can only assure you of my humble contribution to the best of my capacities towards the child welfare with your active help and co-operation. Let us all resolve to build-up a strong infrastruc-

ture for IAP which has already been laid down by my immediate predecessors Dr. R.D. Potdar, Dr. Meharban Singh, and Secretary Dr. M.R. Lokeshwar with the Executive Board Members.

Through the continuous efforts of all the dedicated pediatricians, we have been able to achieve the formation of the single body of IAP, which I am pretty sure will grow from strength to strength and eventually will make its presence felt in every area of child health care, not only in India but in the whole world. It will also be our endeavor to establish and maintain the high standards and the efficiency of pediatric fraternity in the country.

The year 1993 has seen tumultuous changes both at the global level as well as in our country. The changes which were political, social and economic have affected the child health of today as well as of future. Our country has gone through its worst ever crisis of balance of payment, rupee devaluation, all time high population of 843.9 million and its consequences. Adding insult to injury, there were unprecedented violence and devastating natural calamities all of which have left deep scars on the nation. However, rays of hope are seen due to the market oriented economic reforms, national literacy mission and reservation of 30% seats for women.

Children are our greatest assets who will shape the future of our country and strengthen the nation. We, the pediatricians are the custodians of their future, and therefore, we all must strive to ensure the optimal growth and development of children, so that they can effectively contribute towards progress of the nation.

Though children constitute 40% of our population; they are not able to air their views, or concerns, as they are not allowed to the houses where national and state policies are formulated. They accept their senior's decisions gratefully and gracefully and therefore the young ones are many a times taken for granted.

Major revamping efforts are necessary to protect the lives and ensure -the healthy development of children. Global unified efforts are required to end the poverty on this planet. The efforts in this direction, therefore, will be the greatest long-term investment, which the human race could make in its future to achieve universal economic prosperity, political stability and environmental integrity and safety.

I take this opportunity to share with you my perceptions and perspectives regarding the policies and directions which we all have to pursue to improve the status of the child population.

#### **Indian Academy of Pediatrics**

Our Academy is in the forefront wherever interests of children are concerned, like health, nutrition, immunization, education, environment, child labor, his protection as a consumer or any other matter related to child welfare in this country.

Today, IAP is one of the most active bodies of medical specialists. It has been widely represented in most of the governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with the welfare of the children and is instrumental in giving guidelines and recommendations on several issues of national relevance.

However, there is a need to streamline the functioning of the academy and involve it not only in the academic matter but also

social aspects related to the total upliftment of the child.

First step towards this direction will be to update our office so that it can be used as a referral and communication centre by all our members. The process of providing upto date facilities in our IAP office at Bombay has already started. Dr. M.R. Lokeshwar, our General Secretary, has been doing commendable job along with the staff of IAP. We are also updating our library and would aim at getting our computer connected to computer library in USA to siphon references and other information about recent advances and present events in pediatrics. Once we are all close-knit and well communicated, we may be able to establish good-rapport with our branches all over India. We will also try to have co-ordinated approach to the child health with the help of NGOs and other like-minded organizations.

We also intend to strengthen the organizational network of the IAP by publication of a book on various administrative and organizational rules, regulations and guidelines providing details of procedures protocol, objectives, and policies for IAP, routines for holding annual conventions and conferences and rules for various IAP awards.

#### **Continuing Medical Education Programme**

Health care to the children in the community is being provided mostly by general practitioners. Therefore, the idea of updating their knowledge and skills has been pursued by countrywide CME programmes with the help of state/district branches of IAP, and active support of IMA, MCI, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and UNICEF.

Our immediate past president, Dr. Meharban Singh has already drafted a plan of action and has nearly completed Phase I of the programme. It will be our endeavour to complete this project during my tenure. We would implement this CME programme on comprehensive maternal and child care all over the country.

### **Pediatric Education**

I am happy to inform the members that our long cherished dream of having an independent status to pediatrics at undergraduate level is on the verge of fulfillment. The MCI has finally agreed to it and the matter has been forwarded for the final approval to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. We expect its early clearance and implementation.

I am thankful to all the members of the Academy who have been instrumental in achieving this landmark; but I would like to specially mention the President of Medical Council of India Dr. A.K.N. Sinha, Dr. B.N.S. Walia and Dr. B.C. Chhparwal for their commitment and dedication in this matter.

I am proud to state here that Nagpur University has been the first university in the country to accord an independent status to pediatrics in final MBBS Examination way back in 1979. I must gratefully acknowledge the untiring efforts of my respected teacher Dr. A.M. Sur for achieving this herculean goal.

IAP can play a pivotal role in the process of developing the standard curricula for post graduate diploma and degree courses and make necessary recommendations for uniform system of examination all over the country.

### **Girl Child Education**

Education and development are two sides of the same coin. The value of sending a girl child to the school is not recognized by many parents in our country. However, it has been proved beyond doubt that schooling for girls has far reaching social and economic benefits. A wide gender gap in education is reflected in social conditions, such as higher infant mortality rates and larger family sizes. You would agree with me that each girl born in India must go to school, as educated mothers can offer better child care.

A legendary achievement of Kerala in education and its positive fall outs would set an appropriate example of constructive effects of literacy on child health.

### **Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning**

Efforts for the enhancement of women's status and their role in development must begin with the girl child. Equal opportunities should be provided for the girl child to benefit from the health, nutrition, education and other basic services to enable her to grow to her full potentials. Maternal health, nutrition and education are important for the survival and well being of women in their own right, and are key determinants of the health and well being of the child in early infancy.

There is an added benefit of promoting maternal and child health programmes and family planning together. Acting synergistically, these activities help to reduce both mortality and fertility rates, and contribute more to lowering rates of population growth. The Indian Academy of Pediatrics is duty bound to fight for achieving this, as it believes in the proverb 'a stitch in time saves nine'.

### **Status to Newborn**

In 1950, Gessel described the newborn "The poor babe, like a seaman, wrecked, thrown from the waves, lies naked on the ground." More than 44 years later, still the newborn of 1994 has failed to achieve a separate identity.

In most of the Medical Colleges, Neonatal Units are at Level-I with inadequate facilities. I, therefore, appeal to the Government to sanction Department of Neonatology attached to the Department of Pediatrics and Obstetrics along with adequate staff, doctors and nursing personnel in all the medical colleges. It should provide atleast Level II care at all Medical Colleges and District Hospitals and Level I at all the Primary Health Centres.

### **Suckling Leave for Working Mother**

A breastfed baby of a working mother is robbed-off its right to feed adequately as his mother is not given rightful leave for the purpose. IAP and NNF have been trying to convince the Government for sanctioning adequate maternity leave for promoting breastfeeding. I am happy to announce that the states of Haryana and Punjab have already set the trend and sanctioned six months maternity leave for working mothers.

I will strive hard for its implementation at national level with the active co-operation and perseverance of our members in each state.

### **GOBRI-FFFC**

UNICEF has appropriately given the slogan of GOBI-FFFC. I would suggest that it should further be modified and renamed as GOBRI-FFFC. 'R' should indicate the care of respiratory infections. Let our mothers know more about

respiratory programme. The mortality and morbidity due to respiratory infections will be reduced further by accepting ARI programme, which IAP has already implemented through its branches all over the country.

### **AIDS in Children and Sex Education**

As Dr. Reginald Boulos, Haitian Pediatrician said "Unless something is done soon, AIDS threatens to wipe out all the progress we have made in child survival in the last 10 years."

The precise number of HIV infected children are impossible to estimate. As Dr. Wilson Carswell, Technical Advisor on AIDS points out that "We hear very little about AIDS prevalence in children because children are invisible, socially and economically and the earliest effects of HIV are unspectacular. The suffering baby appears to be simply going through typical childhood maladies."

As you all know, we are sitting on the sleeping volcano of AIDS. I feel that the mass education at a community level for safer sex and prevention of AIDS is necessary. Sex education which is neglected in our country since long will have to be successfully implemented at least at the high school level. In the US, the authorities have recently introduced sex education even at primary and middle school levels. IAP is ready to offer its share by way of resources and personnel for successfully carrying out this programme with the help of the Government.

### **Doordarshan Channel for Children**

The Government of India has introduced new TV channels recently. However, it has not given due justice to the children who constitute 40% of the population.

It will be our endeavour to convince the Government for a separate TV channel meant exclusively for the children. This KID channel should provide entertainment and education for the child through its programmes. I expect it to take the place of a loving grandmother who shapes the personality of children offering social and moral education alongwith knowledge through her interesting stories in simple language.

This very idea has been floated by one of our Executive Board Member, Dr. S.W. Chorghade from Nagpur. I am sure you will appreciate and support our idea.

#### **IAP Press Syndicate**

The parents of children deserve a better deal from various audio visual media. They should get proper and up-to-date knowledge about their own health and that of their children. Therefore, the idea of IAP-PRESS SYNDICATE.

We expect that the various Government and Non-Government Organizations should consult IAP on any matters related to child care, wherein we will provide them with relevant matters through our members. The Academy would initiate a movement to create this revolution in information, education and communication for the masses, parents, children and adolescents, in particular.

#### **Consumer Protection Act**

With increasing number of private pediatric nursing homes and intensive pediatric care units, we are all exposed to legal suits under proposed Consumer Protection Act. The stand of IAP should be to protect the interest of its members who have been rationally practicing pediatrics. I would do my best for the proper repre-

sentation to the Government and for necessary amendments in the law to promote adequate pediatric care in the country.

I would rather moot an idea of Community Protection Act in the interest of the welfare of the community at large, who are deprived of their basic human rights like primary health care facilities, adequate and safe drinking water, food grains and common consumer items including essential medicines. The Government should introduce the Community Protection Act to offer protection to ethically reasonable and responsible citizens and punish the erring individuals.

#### **Health for All by 2000 AD**

To speak especially of 1994, universal goal of 'Health for all by 2000 AD' seems to be quietly slipping away from our control. It is a sad reality that we are nowhere near the enunciated health indices and target set in to achieve by the end of the century. There are many reasons for the failure of our commitment of global health care of our children. More than 3 million children per annum are dying quietly in India alone due to low birth weight, malnutrition and respiratory infections. In spite of this, there seems to be less enthusiasm on the part of the Government to open up the institutions for maternal and child health care. Therefore, the slogan of 'Health for All by 2000 AD' seems to be an empty promise unless it is undertaken with political will to provide food for all, education for all, safe drinking water for all, homes for all and above all dignity for all.

#### **Offering Children a Bright Future**

UNICEF views that principle of FIRST CALL should influence the nature of progress in all nations in the 1990s and beyond. In a sense, it implies that the

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growing minds and bodies of children should have first call on society's capacities and that children should be able to depend upon the commitment in good times and in bad. No matter what the nation and no matter what the cause, the time has come to protect children as far as humanly possible, from the mistakes, excesses and vicissitudes of the adult world.

More broadly, today's children look forward to our renewed commitment of providing them adequate nutrition, clean water, safe sanitation, primary health care and basic education (including for all girls) in the decade ahead.

Before I conclude, I would like to sincerely thank and congratulate the organizers of the 8th Asian Congress of Pediatrics and XXXI National Conference of LAP for carrying out this mega academic event successfully without any financial assistance

from the infant food industries, and thereby setting a global precedent. This is as per our commitment for the promotion of breastfeeding and for the welfare of the mother and child. With this we are approaching a new era of BABY FRIENDLINESS.

Dear fellow delegates, with your valuable support, guidance and encouragement, I look forward to 1994 as an year of activity, progress and achievement towards better child health.

With a special word of appreciation which is due to Dr. R.D. Potdar, President APSSEAR, Dr. R.K. Puri, Secretary General, Dr. H.P.S. Sachdev, Dr. Swati Bhave, Joint Secretaries, and to the dedicated Committee Members of 8th Asian Congress, I conclude.

Jai IAP : Jai Hind