

The journey of an Indian pediatric cardiologist

The journey of an Indian pediatric cardiologist, who gave substantial attention to advance new knowledge and teach/train physicians around the world while providing care to patients with heart disease over a 45-year period, is examined. This review focuses on the scientific contributions to the literature.

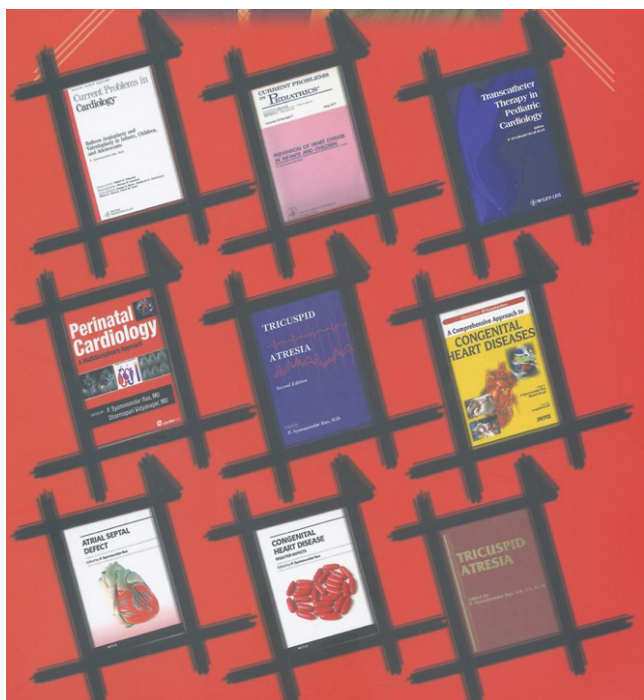


Fig. 1. Photographs of some of the books published by Dr. Rao.

While a student at Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, I was entertaining the idea of either becoming a surgeon or a pediatrician. During my internship, I took care of two cyanotic (blue) babies to whom we could only give blow-by oxygen; unfortunately, both babies died in our hands. These babies turned out to have severe structural abnormalities of the heart. These incidences enticed me the idea of going to USA and get training to become a pediatric cardiologist and return to India to serve our people. This thinking may have probably dwindled away, but for the fact that one my professors, Dr. Laxhmana Rao, who just then returned from a sabbatical at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA invited Dr. Hellen B. Taussig, who is considered the mother of Pediatric Cardiology to visit our medical school. The Department of Pediatrics presented a number of children with heart problems to Dr. Taussig during a three-day period. Dr. Taussig evaluated the clinical, chest x-ray, ECG and blood work results of these patients and discussed each case in an immense detail. I was lucky to attend these sessions, which firmed up my aspiration to become a pediatric cardiologist. Within two years of this incidence, I landed in USA,

completed training pediatrics and wanted to be trained in pediatric cardiology at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. But, unfortunately, this did not occur because the funding for fellowship at Johns Hopkins at that time needed immigrant or citizenship status. I was on J-1 visa and therefore, ineligible for funding. Luckily, I was able to get training at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, Case-Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio and University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California. My attempts to return to India after completing the training were unsuccessful and therefore, I accepted a faculty position (Assistant Professor) in 1972 at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Georgia. By 1979, I became a full Professor. Two further attempts to return to India were unsuccessful. Subsequently I moved to King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as Consultant Pediatric Cardiologist, became Chairman of Pediatrics. Then I returned to USA as Professor and Director of Pediatric Cardiology at University of Wisconsin Medical School, Madison, Wisconsin. Then moved on to St. Louis University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri and University of Texas McGovern Medical School, Houston, Texas.

During the 45 years of pediatric cardiology practice, in addition to taking care of patients with heart disease, I focused on the development of new knowledge and train and teach physicians around the world. These endeavors lead me to visit to a number of countries including India, several cities in USA, Argentina, Australia, Finland, France, Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, Brazil and Japan to present our research results and/or to demonstrate catheter interventional procedures. The research endeavors resulted in publication of 380 papers in journals (as first or senior author), 230 abstract presentations, 17 monographs and books (Fig. 1) and 140 book chapters as well as 150 invited presentations and lectureships. The research interests were focused on three different areas: 1. Intra-cardiac defects which are actually helpful to the children, but still close naturally, 2. A cardiac defect in which the right sided valve is completely blocked and 3. Development of catheter procedures that can be performed in children in order to avoid open-heart surgery.

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