

Dr. B.A. Anantharam: A Legend Who Held Hands and Created Smiles

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Dr. B.A. Anantharam (►Fig. 1), a renowned and respected plastic surgeon, is fondly remembered for his significant contributions to the medical community.

“As a schoolboy, he was inspired by a Readers Digest article on the pioneering work in hand surgery by Dr Paul Brand at Karigiri, and it was then that he had decided to become a hand surgeon,” says his son Dr. Anusham who inspired by his father is a plastic surgeon himself. After graduating from Bangalore Medical College in the 1964 batch, he pursued MS in General Surgery from Government Stanley Medical College, Chennai. He then joined as the esteemed staff of St. John’s Hospital in Bangalore, where he

began his journey toward excellence and his dream. Driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, he pursued an MCh degree from Madras Medical College, further honing his skills and expanding his expertise. Despite St. John’s Hospital relocating to its own premises, Dr. Anantharam made a deliberate choice to continue his professional journey at St. Martha’s Hospital, a testament to his dedication and commitment to his patients and colleagues (►Fig. 2). He trained as a microsurgical research fellow at Dr. G Ian Taylor’s Reconstructive Plastic Surgery Unit in Melbourne.

When I joined as a Senior House Officer in the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at St. Martha’s Hospital from 1990 to mid-1991, immediately after my internship, working under the guidance of Dr. B.A. Anantharam was an extraordinary experience. I was scared at first which turned around to admiration, respect, and trust in a very short time. At the end of my tenure, I had a log book of about 600 cases assisted and operated on my own (mainly hand injuries). I learnt to respect tissues, patients, and their attendees from Dr. Anantharam. As trainees, we did not want to incur his displeasure that was not a pleasant experience, says one of the other trainees Dr. Neeta Byrappa. He was extremely eloquent and had a brilliant sense of humor that was spontaneous and had us on splits on numerous occasions. He was extremely affectionate and proud of us and stood up for us always.

He was a man of exceptional intelligence, with a sharp mind and a meticulous approach to his work. His exacting standards and high expectations set the bar for his trainees, urging them to strive for excellence in every aspect of their practice. Dr. Anantharam was known for his meticulous record-keeping, leaving no stone unturned in his pursuit of comprehensive patient care.

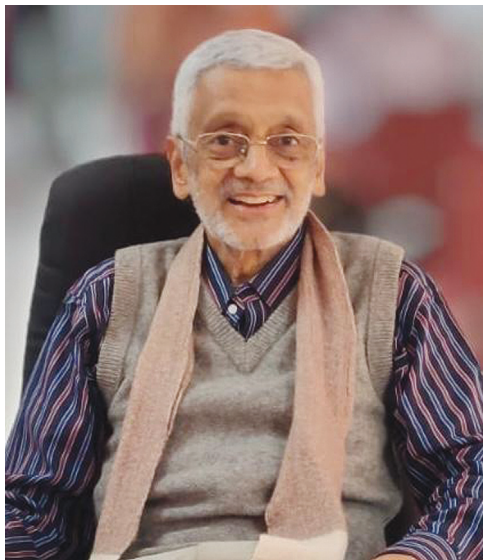


Fig. 1 Dr. B. A. Ananthram.

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Fig. 2 At St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore.

Dr. Anantharam's expertise extended to a wide range of surgical specialties, with a particular focus on hand surgery. He was the past president of the Indian Society of Surgery for Hand (ISSH); as a president, he held ISSHCON annual meeting at Bangalore in 2008. He also served as Secretary of Association of Surgeons of India (ASI), Executive Committee member of Association of Plastic Surgeons of India (APSI).

He was renowned for his dedicated visits to various industries, emphasizing the importance of workplace safety precautions. His unwavering commitment to patient well-being and his love for his craft shone through in every interaction. Patients and their families held him in high regard, particularly those seeking treatment for conditions such as cleft lips, palates, microtia, and burns contractures of the neck. Dr. Anantharam's surgical interventions brought smiles to the faces of countless individuals, transforming lives and instilling hope.

One of Dr. Anantharam's special areas of interest was the study and treatment of hemangiomas. His dedication to this field led him to develop an extensive case series and present his findings at numerous conferences. Through his meticulous documentation of pre- and postoperative photographs, he showcased the transformative power of his surgical interventions. Dr. Anantharam's commitment to advancing the field of plastic and reconstructive surgery was unwavering, and his contributions continue to shape the practice today.

In the operating theater, Dr. Anantharam was a surgeon par excellence. With precise movements and a deep understanding of anatomy, he approached each procedure with a

clear vision and a steady hand. His attention to detail was remarkable, and every stitch he took had a purpose. Trainees were privileged to observe and learn from his surgical expertise. Dr. Anantharam had an exceptional ability to simplify complex concepts and convey them with clarity. He instilled in his trainees a solid foundation of surgical knowledge, nurturing their growth, and encouraging them to become skilled and compassionate surgeons.

Dr. Anantharam's impact extended far beyond the walls of the operating theater. He was known for his generosity and genuine care for his trainees, often treating them to meals and extending invitations to his home. His eloquence, sense of humor, and warm demeanor endeared him to all who had the pleasure of working with him. He created an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, fostering an environment where trainees could thrive and learn.

Throughout his career, Dr. Anantharam earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues and peers. The anesthesiologist Dr. Rosemary says that he never pushed to get his case on the table; if the team had any reservations, especially in children with cleft lip and palate, his attitude was, "How can we optimize and when can we post." She also says it was very reassuring to give anesthesia for his cases. Most of them had to say that working with him in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation was a pleasure. On the lighter side, I have seen some scared to come into his theater; they would prepare their minds and subject from the previous night.

His extensive knowledge, impeccable surgical skills, and unwavering dedication to patient care set him apart as a true luminary in the field. Dr. Anantharam's influence extended well beyond his immediate colleagues and had a lasting impact on the medical community. His dedication to his patients was unwavering, and his commitment to providing the best possible care was evident in every interaction. Dr. Anantharam's expertise and compassion made him a trusted and sought-after surgeon, and both patients and fellow medical professionals highly regarded him.

Dr. Anantharam's influence extended beyond his clinical practice. He was known for his philanthropic endeavors, particularly his efforts to support the treatment of underprivileged patients. He established a fund to ensure that financial constraints did not hinder access to necessary medical care, reflecting his deep sense of social responsibility. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in establishing Annasawmy Mudaliar General Hospital, a testament to his enduring legacy and commitment to serving the community. He was a well-respected Freemason dedicated to the organization, serving for decades with numerous charitable projects. He was a keen golfer, and carpenter, loved his plants and trees.

Despite facing personal challenges, Dr. Anantharam remained steadfast in his dedication to his profession. He took his MBA PGDHHM exams from IGNOU in February 2023, a month before his passing away and was declared successful in June 2023. His energy, enthusiasm, and enduring passion for his work were infectious and inspired those around him. Even in his later years, he continued to contribute to the field and serve as a mentor to younger generations of medical professionals.

The loss of Dr. B.A. Anantharam is deeply felt by the medical community. His contributions to plastic and reconstructive surgery, his compassionate patient care, and his philanthropic endeavors leave a lasting imprint on the field and the lives of those he touched. His memory will be

cherished, and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations of medical professionals.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.