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Presidential Address

RUSTOM J. MANEKSHA, F.R.C.S.

Delivered on the occasion of the Sixth Summer Conference
of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a proud privilege to hold this sixth Summer meeting in Jaipur — a city of such historical interest and beautiful surroundings. When Dr. Chandalia desired to hold this summer meeting here I was happy in two ways — one rather selfish as he had to do all the spadework to make this conference a success and secondly that his department here would get the necessary publicity and boosting up that it will surely receive from the Health Department of Rajasthan.

We were a small group of plastic surgeons when we first met in Nagpur over fifteen years ago but have rapidly expanded and are still expanding, and to be the President of this organisation is one of the finest distinctions which can be bestowed upon a member of our speciality and this fills me with a profound sense of gratitude. I am also very happy that the Indian contingent was very well represented at the Fifth International Congress in Melbourne last February; all the papers were very well accepted and we made very good friends with plastic surgeons from all over the world. We tried our level best to invite the confederation to hold the next congress in Delhi which as you all know has been awarded to France in 1975. We were treated right royally by our

Australian hosts to the extent that we were their guests for the duration of the congress! The thanks mainly goes to Mr. Rank for his interest in our group.

This time we embark upon a new venture and honour one of the pioneers of plastic surgery — Sir Harold Gillies and the first oration will be given by no other than the senior and most lovable surgeon amongst us Dr. Robin Sinha, also popularly known as "Dada". I can easily say about his qualities of head and heart thus — "The capital of a professional man is not in the bank, or in the stock exchange or in the pocketbook. It is safely deposited forever in the heart and the head of the doctor." He was responsible for the great success of the Asian Pacific Congress in Delhi last year. We all look upon him for guidance.

For the success of this meeting I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the members of this committee — Dr. Sinha, Dr. Suresh Gupta, Col. Ganguly and of course Dr. Chandalia. Without their assistance and support, my own efforts would have been a futile gesture, Dr. Chandalia has really worked very hard during these last couple of months.

Our Problems :

Our country is a land of many languages

and vast problems. Surgery here requires great sympathy, patience, skill and a lot of self sacrifice in time and money. While we are proud of our progress, we are by no means content. There are problems to be solved as well as opportunities to be explored. I shall discuss a few of them that I think are important—

1) We are still very short of trained plastic surgeons. We must have at least one plastic surgeon for each of our medical college and he should be able to train selected people for this speciality. The selection of a proper person for this field requires some elucidation. The budding plastic surgeon must have a creative nature and the imagination to conceive the desired result. Secondly, the intelligence to understand each step of the best way to achieve that result and finally the technical facility to consummate it. It is my personal belief that clinical plastic surgery is mostly commonsense surgery and should be kept as simple as possible without breaking any of the tenets of general surgery. Guidance to an initiate in this subject is necessary, but to a certain limit only, from there on he must use his own common sense and judgement and plan out the mode of action in a particular case. Too much spoonfeeding is bad. I firmly believe that plastic surgeons are born, they cannot be made and thus the proper selection of the plastic surgeon of the future is not difficult amongst a group of post-graduate doctors. It goes without saying that each candidate must have done at least two or three years of general surgery before he is initiated into plastic surgery, where he spends at least two years of training.

(2) Plastic surgery and public relation-

ship—this important aspect of public education is woefully absent in our country. The association should appoint a Director or Committee of Public Relations that can enlighten the public regarding the type of service provided in our field and adopt various measures to spread information to society. He should act within the framework of medical ethics that there must be a meaningful dialogue between the profession and the public. No profession can survive if it is cut off from the society to which it belongs.

(3) Through the courtesy of Messrs. Johnson and Johnson we have now a travel grant for a junior plastic surgeon or a trainee to visit other centres all over India. I may suggest that we senior plastic surgeons can learn a lot by visiting the departments of our colleagues for a couple of days for exchange of ideas. An exchange programme should be devised by us.

(4) There is a great need for a central Library on similar lines as the Webster Library in the States. Fortunately any of the large centres with full time men could take up this project. Reprints of all articles published in any part of the world has to be filed and photostatic prints sent to any plastic surgeon who needs it in Asia.

(5) To establish an All India Tissue Bank where homo and hetero-graft are preserved at low temperature or freeze dried. These grafts should be made available to any hospital all over India. These preserved skin grafts may help to save innumerable lives of badly burnt cases. The All India Medical Centre at Delhi would be the fit place for such a Bank.

(6) To establish a Board of Plastic Surgeons of India similar to the American Board of examiners. Any senior trainee who has worked in the department for a period of five years or more and has published atleast three original papers should be considered for the Fellowship to the Board. The members of the Board should be all the heads of the different plastic units all over India.

These are some of the points that I have thought over. I am very much in agreement with Mr. J. Penn of South Africa whose problems are similar to ours, when he says this hopeful note—"Some believe that the problem is insoluble and therefore there is

no problem — In spite of the hazards and difficulties which confront the plastic surgeon — I am certain that a healthy future is possible and those in power should roll up their sleeves and do something about it."

In conclusion let me quote the well known advice of late Sir Hutchinson — "Protect yourself from too much zeal for the new, and contempt for what is old; from putting knowledge before wisdom; science before art, from treating patients as cases and from making the cure more grievous than the illness."

I thank you !