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Rajendra Kapila

The eminent infectious disease specialist succumbed to COVID-19 during a visit to India on April 28, 2021.



Rajendra Kapila, an eminent infectious disease specialist and professor at Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA, died on April 28, 2021, in Delhi, India. He was diagnosed with COVID-19 on April 8, 2021, and died from the disease at an Indian hospital, at the age of 81 years.

Calling him “a genuine giant in the field of infectious diseases”, Rutgers University remembered his 50 years of services in taking care of thousands of patients and training a large number of medical students, fellows, and residents, at the University Hospital, New Jersey Medical School, and the Martland Hospital. In a statement, the university also remembered Kapila’s contribution as a globally recognised infectious disease specialist with phenomenal knowledge and sharpness in diagnosing and treating the “most complex” diseases.

Kapila was the founder of the University’s Division of Infectious Diseases. He promoted the division’s continued and substantial growth and development, and helped establish it as “one of the leading infectious diseases programs” in the USA. Also, he was a founding member of the New Jersey Infectious Disease Society, and a recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ).

“It is not an exaggeration to say that Dr Rajendra Kapila was one of a kind —a true superstar infectious diseases clinician and educator”, said Lisa Dever, professor and vice chair, Department of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. “I have been fortunate to have known Dr Kapila for over 30 years. The depth and breadth of his knowledge of infectious diseases, and his generosity

in sharing it, was absolutely extraordinary. His impact will be long lasting”, she told *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

About Kapila, Dever pointed out that he was “the first and last person to go to for advice on difficult infectious disease problems”. He literally taught thousands of students, residents, and fellows at the bedside and in teaching conferences and lectures. According to Dever, Kapila’s generosity in being available to teach others was truly remarkable. He was recognised for his clinical and teaching excellence by multiple awards and honors during his career, she added.

Kapila published more than 100 articles during his long career that made major contributions to the field, said Dever. “Seminal publications include the treatment of anaerobic pneumonias and the effectiveness of clindamycin. He was the first to suggest HIV-2 as a cause of AIDS in the United States in 1983, which led to changes in blood bank practices”, she noted.

Kapila graduated from the St Xavier College in Kolkata, India, and did his MBBS at the Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, India. He completed his residency at the Irwin Hospital, India. Then, he went to the USA. There, he worked as an intern, resident, and fellow at Martland Hospital in Newark, New Jersey. Also, during the Vietnam conflict, Kapila worked an assistant chief of medicine in the US Army in Okinawa, Japan. In 1973, he received his UMDNJ appointment, and in 1976, he also received the university hospital appointment.

As an individual, according to the Rutgers University statement, Kapila was a soft spoken, smart, and humble person. However, he was helpful

to other doctors and caring about humankind, and his patients.

Anugya Mittal, a medical student at the Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, told *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*: “Dr. Kapila was an extremely accomplished physician and academician known for his clinical acumen. I remember being in awe while watching him lead ID [infectious diseases] rounds as he asked questions and brought up concerns no one even thought of”.

“He was, however, not only a world-renowned doctor but also an amazing teacher who took the time to spread his vast knowledge”, commented Mittal. “He always encouraged asking questions, looking at the bigger picture, and keeping up with the latest research”, she recalled. “I was privileged to have had the opportunity to be under his mentorship and hope that I can embody some of his qualities someday as a physician. I will always fondly remember Dr Kapila as a humble and knowledgeable advocate for his patients with a love for both teaching and learning”, she added.

Kapila returned to India during the last week of March 2021 to look after his family and was scheduled to return to the USA by mid-April. Although he reportedly received the two doses of COVID-19 vaccine in the USA, the disease caught him in India in early-April. He reportedly had diabetes and cardiac complications. He was admitted in the Shanti Mukund Hospital in New Delhi, where he succumbed to COVID-19 about 3 weeks after the diagnosis of the disease. He is survived by his wife, Deepti Saxena-Kapila, and other family members.

Sanjeet Bagcchi

