

Legends of Indian Orthopedics

Prof. Niranjan Das Aggarwal

Dr. N. D. Aggarwal was born on August 30, 1923, at Bathinda, Punjab. He lost his father in infancy and due to poor financial conditions faced many difficulties in his education. He studied under all constraints by getting scholarships. He did his MBBS from King Edward Medical College, Lahore (1941–1946), winning many medals and being declared the best graduate. He subsequently served in many parts of erstwhile Punjab, namely Jagadhri, Ropar, Shimla, and Patiala. He passed the examination of Masters in General Surgery (with Orthopedics as special subject) in 1953. He then went on to advanced training at the Royal National Hospital, Liverpool, and completed FRCS plus MCh (Orth.) in record time. On return to India, he started the Orthopedic Department at Rajendra Hospital and Medical College, Patiala. He developed the department into a full-fledged orthopedic department, and he is aptly called the “Father” of the GMC Patiala Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Departments.

He developed a specialised rehabilitation center. This center used to prepare calipers and artificial limbs and gave physiotherapy and occupational therapy at Patiala. He was instrumental in developing a museum of pathologic specimens, which is unparalleled in good departments even today. He set up another center, now known as Punjab Saket Hospital where free surgery for polio/physically challenged children was done, as well as free education and training were imparted to patients who were admitted for long periods.

He had a special interest in skeletal fluorosis and had significant research in this field; many quadriplegics were able to recover when he started spinal interventions. His research interest varied and focused on the reconstruction of forearm gaps, clubfoot treatment, and many aspects of neglected trauma. His research on ischemic contractures helped differentiate ischemic compression from classic Volkmann’s ischemic contracture, which helped him to treat his patients innovatively. He subsequently authored the chapter on ischemic compression and compartment syndrome in the Indian Orthopaedics Association text book.

His greatest contribution has been in teaching and training a band of able orthopedic surgeons. He was focused on teaching the art and craft of surgery, basing this on the fundamental principles of Sir Robert Jones. As one of his students, I can vouch that he showed exemplary dedication in imparting knowledge, skill, and



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competence. He was elected as the President of Indian Orthopedic Association in its Silver Jubilee year. As Vice Principal of Government Medical College, Patiala, he took active part in all academic and cocurricular activities. Dr. N D Aggarwal had five children; two sons and three daughters. One of the sons followed in his footsteps and became an orthopedic surgeon, one daughter is a doctor, and his other three children are engineers. He was a family man and enjoyed time with his children and grandchildren.

Dr. Aggarwal lived a very simple and disciplined life. During his illustrious career in Orthopedics spanning more than 50 years, he received numerous awards and citations. He was awarded with Padma Shree in 1982 for his work and also received the "Punjab Ratan" award. He was a self-made man who rose by sheer force of determination to his cherished goal of becoming a doctor and healing others. With the demise of Dr. Aggarwal in November 2001, the country lost not only an excellent surgeon but also an admirable human being who believed in helping people in all walks of life.

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