

The Alumni Award of Distinction
of the Christian Medical College Alumni Association
for the year **2008**

is given to

Professor T Jacob John

Dr.Thekkekara Jacob John joined the Christian Medical College as senior house officer in 1959 after completing MBBS in Trivandrum Medical College. He then completed Diploma in Child Health in 1961 and went on study leave to the UK where he obtained Membership of the Royal College of Physicians in Pediatrics in 1964. Then he went to University of Colorado (USA) for a Fellowship in Pediatric Infectious Diseases where he also completed M.Sc (Microbiology) to learn laboratory aspects of infectious diseases. In 1966, he returned to CMC and in 1968 he took over the Enterovirus Laboratory (a research unit in the Department of Child Health).With his background of clinical and laboratory medicine, Dr. John established many laboratory tests for infectious diseases.

Dr. John opened India's first diagnostic virology laboratory in 1968. To train doctors in using tests scientifically, he insisted on consultation on every patient - he would examine, discuss, write notes and do appropriate tests, all free as research funds were generous. He introduced donor screening for hepatitis B in 1972, first in the developing world barring Taiwan. In 1978 the ICMR awarded a Centre for Advanced Research in Virology for 5 years under Dr. John, and later extended it for two more terms. In 1985 he established a Retrovirus laboratory and field investigation unit resulting in the detection of HIV infection in 1986 in Vellore, Chennai and Madurai.

Dr. John was held in high regard as an undergraduate and postgraduate teacher and as a research guide for MD and PhD students. His contributions in the fields of basic virology, infectious diseases and vaccinology have placed the Virology Department on the academic world map. The Infectious Diseases Clinic was established by him in 1987. He introduced donor screening for HIV in 1988. The Private Patient Service Facility and the daily immunization clinic (Rotary-CMC Well Baby Clinic) were designed by him.

Challenged by the frequency of measles, SSPE and polio, Dr. John established projects to prevent and control them in the whole of the North Arcot district. CMC's first air-conditioned car was used to transport vaccines in bulk. Due to measles vaccination campaigns from 1978, keratomalacia virtually disappeared from 1979. That year, his measles vaccination camps in Arcot and Arakonam attracted over 5000 children each, proving to the State Government the popularity of and the demand for measles vaccine. "Pulse vaccination" using OPV was his initiative, with which the annual average of polio cases in Vellore was brought down from 51 to 4 in one year and later to zero. To document the reduction in disease burden by vaccinations, he established a district level disease surveillance system, with monthly publication of NADHI (North Arcot District Health Information). In 1986, he established a voluntary HIV testing clinic, in which counselors were employed full time. The HIV prevention message was taken to all local

schools and colleges – a model that has been replicated by the National HIV Control Organization.

At the national level, Dr. John persuaded the Government to include measles vaccine in the national immunization programme (1985) and to establish HIV testing centres in every State (1986). The national guidelines for sentinel surveillance, criteria for testing and confirming results, non-discriminatory hospital treatment, blood safety, infection control, voluntary testing clinic, counseling, maternal screening etc. were established by him. Dr. John was elected President of the Indian association of Medical Microbiologists (IAMM) in 1994 and the President of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) in 1999. In 2007, he led a team and solved the problem of recurrent annual outbreaks of acute brain disease of children with > 75% case fatality in Western Uttar Pradesh - infectious etiology was disproved; instead plant poisoning was found to be the cause.

Dr. John identified geographical variations of children's response to oral live poliovirus vaccine, which turned out to be true with all oral live vaccines. His pioneering studies on responses to OPV and injected polio vaccine (IPV) have guided global agencies in using these vaccines in tropical developing countries. Dr. John was a founding member of the Global Polio Eradication Project of the Rotary International.

Dr. John has authored over 480 scientific papers of original work, reviews, invited editorials and commentaries. Several awards were conferred on him – The Fr. Lourdu Yeddanapalle Award for Research in CMC (1973), Outstanding Alumnus of 25 years from Trivandrum Medical College (1976), BC Roy Award for Eminent Medical Man of the Year (1990), BR Ambedkar Centenary Award for Biomedical Research (2000) and many others by ICMR, Indian Science Academy, Academy of Medical Sciences, IAMM and IAP. He has the unique distinction of having been elected to all Science Academies in India. The Lancet Infectious Diseases wrote a tribute to him in November 2001. He has served and continues to serve as chairman / member on many scientific committees of the ICMR, Ministry of Health, DBT and WHO.

Among his varied extracurricular interests is the greening of the earth. For example, the four fishtail palms in front of YWCA canteen and innumerable trees on both campuses were raised in his nursery and planted by him. His rain water harvesting system is now famous.

In recognition of his pioneering contributions to the fields of pediatric infectious diseases, clinical virology, vaccinology, epidemiology and control of HIV/AIDS, the CMC Alumni Association is proud to present its Award of Distinction for the year 2008 to Professor T. Jacob John.

9th Aug. 2008
Vellore

President
CMC Alumni Association.

