

## The College Motto award 2017

### Dr. Nidhi Chaudhary

Nidhi Chaudhary, the youngest of three siblings, hails from Chandigarh. Academic excellence was one of her traits and she could have easily gained admission into any medical college in India. Her father insisted she attend the interview for CMC, Vellore, a place no one in her family had heard of. Twenty-five years ago, that place became home as Nidhi joined the Batch of 1992. On graduating in 1998, Nidhi joined CMC Ludhiana from where she completed her DCH in 2001. An opportunity to implement a health program with an NGO for underprivileged adolescents and home-based care for infant children in the villages and slums of Haryana and Chandigarh set the pace for what was to follow.

After 3 years of working with adolescents, she joined UNICEF to work with the Uttar Pradesh State Health System, focusing on improving immunisation coverage. The experience was an eye-opener; she encountered first-hand the grim health realities that a majority of Indians face, and the challenges of an exigent public health system. Through strategic planning and training of workers, she focussed on rigorous implementation that led to an improvement in the routine immunisation and Vitamin A coverage in the focus districts where she was working. Enthused, she moved to the neighbouring state of Uttarakhand in 2006 and worked with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. She developed and implemented guidelines to improve the health indicators of women and children and trained ANMs and ASHA workers who worked at the grassroots level. Inspired by her experience at CHAD, Nidhi initiated Mobile Health Vans that reached previously underserved areas in Uttarakhand could be replicated across India at a low and affordable cost.

In 2009, Nidhi took on the additional responsibility of National Professional Officer – Nutrition, Food Safety and Nursing Education and worked with the WHO in India. This gave her the opportunity to liaise with UN agencies and the Government to implement policies and strategies according to WHO recommendations. In this role, Nidhi developed guidelines on nutrition for children with severe acute malnutrition and children infected with HIV; she disseminated WHO practices to medical and nursing students, and other health trainees. This led to greater responsibilities as team leader in the northern belt of India. The experience and awareness gained from the COP and CHP postings as a student in CMC stood her in good stead as she worked to promote low cost high impact interventions for Reproductive, Maternal New born, Child and Adolescent health (RMNCHA) in five high-priority districts.

In 2016, Nidhi felt called to pursue her dream of serving her community directly. She trained in the School of Social Entrepreneurs, New Delhi and, along with her sister, set up the Navya Tarang Clinics in Chandigarh. Of this endeavour she says, *“I find the inequities in continued high rates of illness and deaths due to preventable causes amongst underprivileged groups highly disturbing. Women and children die not to incurable diseases, but due to lack of our willingness as a society to ensure access to quality health services for all. Navya Tarang endeavours to ensure equitable access to quality health services for the underprivileged. By establishing a network of Tarang primary health care clinics, I want to break the vicious cycle of illness, poverty and*

*debt by providing quality curative, preventive and promotive primary health services at an affordable cost."*

Nidhi invested in the first clinic with her personal savings. It is an OPD based service, and she has liaised with a charitable hospital for diagnostic and laboratory services. She runs this clinic as a not-for-profit social enterprise and raises income to be only self-sustainable. She aims to open 5 more primary health care centres for the urban poor in the city and a multispecialty centre. Based on the success of the Navya Tarang project, Nidhi was recently selected by IIM Bangalore to participate in the 'Launch pad for Social Ventures.' Unstinting in their support has been her family, particularly her husband, Dr. Balwinder Mohan (Batch of 1990) and their two sons, Gul Samarth and Krishiv.

Clearly, Nidhi has taken the road less travelled. She sees the deeply entrenched challenges of the public health system and the inequities in health care as opportunities for transformation and change. Nidhi's work among the least of our brethren echoes stirring words from the College Song. She strives in her own way to '*banish clouds of suffering*'; to be '*strong to serve, strong to save the defenceless....*', her work and life truly reflecting the motto of CMC, '*Not to be ministered unto but to minister*'. The CMC Alumni Association is proud to present the College Motto Award 2017 to Dr. Nidhi Chaudhary.