

The Paul Harrison Award 2024

The *Paul Harrison Award* was instituted in 1966 to honour medical graduates or post-graduates of CMC Vellore, who, through their outstanding and selfless contribution in the field of healthcare, have been able to uphold the motto of the Institution, '*Not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*' Drs. Deepa and Rajiv Choudhrie now join this august company.

Dr. Deepa Choudhrie *nee* Thomas grew up on the CMC Vellore Campus, while Dr. Rajiv comes from a family of medical missionaries from Central India. Their paths intertwined as classmates of the MBBS batch of 1982 in CMC Vellore. As young medical students, they had a desire to make a difference with their work and life. This commitment took them to Padhar Hospital, Madhya Pradesh. Except for the years of training, Dr. Deepa in Radiology and Dr. Rajiv in General Surgery, both at CMC Vellore, and then Dr. Rajiv in CMC Ludhiana for his higher specialty training in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Padhar Hospital has been the very premise of their being.

Padhar is a picturesque, idyllic village in the heart of India, in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. Yet, it is an area of great need, with a predominantly tribal population and challenging physical, social, and economic conditions. Padhar Hospital, a unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in M.P., had its humble beginnings in 1958. It is today a 200-bed hospital, attracting patients from all over the state, and the neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. Dr. Rajiv has been the Medical Superintendent since 2008.

Dr. Deepa heads the well-equipped Radiology Department and, as one of the few radiologists in the entire district, is always busy. Dr. Rajiv's primary interest lies in Oncoplastic and Microvascular Reconstructive Surgery, but given the demands of a resource-limited rural setting, he is a versatile and skilled surgeon. However, it is the synergy of their visionary and transformative leadership in the development of clinical services, education, and community outreach that has infused a new dynamic and enlarged the canvas of Padhar Hospital.

The Hospital is a multi-speciality centre, with 42,000 OPD patients annually. The state-of-the-art Operating Theatre Complex, Medical, Paediatric, and Surgical ICUs, and Trauma and Emergency Care services are some of the exceptional facilities of the Hospital. Accreditations from the NABL and NABH have ensured high standards and quality care. Crucial have been the partnerships forged with public and private organizations, including, for example, the Azim Premji Foundation, the Consulate of Japan, and the Indian Cancer Society that have resulted in Oxygen plants, essential equipment, support

for construction and development activities, and funding for oncology patients. In collaboration with *Smile Train International* and supported by the Friends of Padhar, Germany, over 7000 free Cleft Lip and Palate Surgeries have been performed, bringing smiles to thousands of patients and their families.

The School of Nursing was a significant milestone in 2011, and it has since been upgraded to a College of Nursing, with GNM and BSc courses. This and several Allied Health Courses have enhanced not just patient care, but the lives of young health professionals. A Fellowship in Head and Neck Oncology was introduced in 2024. The Happy Valley English School, now a higher secondary school with new buildings and 400 confident children, has been empowering in providing quality, affordable, and accessible education to scores of children from Padhar and other villages. They have connected meaningfully to the surrounding areas through practical and comprehensive Community initiatives- the Life Nutrition Program, the Maranatha Deaddiction Program, the Shifa Community Mental Health program, Cancer awareness and screening, and support for the Shahpur Orphanage. Truly, their work exemplifies the motto of Padhar Hospital - *'Burdens lifted, Hope restored'*. Over the years, Drs. Deepa and Rajiv have faced tremendous challenges, yet their deep faith has sustained and strengthened them. As they look to the years ahead, they hope to share their expertise with other mission hospitals.

Nothing encapsulates their life and mission more than the story of the precious conjoined twins, Stuti and Aradhana. Abandoned at birth in Padhar Hospital in 2011, Drs. Deepa and Rajiv took it upon themselves to care and provide for the little girls- and then, they went the extra mile. They reached out to their classmates and other specialists all over the world and planned the complex surgery of separating the little girls at Padhar Hospital.

Padhar Hospital is more than their home- this is their life, for they humbly believe their work is predestined by God and carries an accountability that they dare not take lightly. In doing so, Drs. Deepa and Rajiv Choudhrie have woven a new narrative of selfless service that we, today, celebrate and honour. They have, to paraphrase the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, seen the bush *'afire with God'* and have taken off their shoes. Christian Medical College Vellore rises as one to call them blessed and is proud to confer them with the *Paul Harrison Award* for 2024.