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Looking Back....: Celebrating Successes

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The Silver Jubilee is the 25th anniversary of an important event which in this case is/was the opening of Omayal Achi College of Nursing (OACN) in Chennai, India in 1992. Frequently, we do not take the time to look back on or reflect on the many small successes that lead up to such a celebration. Thus, I share with you my reflections on my journey (personally and professionally) which led me to becoming a member of the OACN family.

In 1992, Omayal Achi College of Nursing (OACN) was established near Ambattur, Chennai. The Governing Council consisted of a number of members including Dr. Arun Chockalingam, who was at that time, working with Health Canada. At that time, in Saskatchewan, I began working with the Prevention Unit of the Saskatchewan Stroke Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Drs. Chocklingam, Shuaib and Reeder were putting together an International Conference on Stroke Prevention and Epidemiology which was held from October 14-16, 1993 in Saskatoon, SK. The Proceedings of this Conference were published by Statistics Canada in Health Reports, 1994 with a number of individuals including Drs. Arun Chockalingam & Viv Ramsden being members of the Editorial Board¹. As a result of these various connections, I was invited to go to Omayal Achi College of Nursing (OACN) in Chennai, India as OACN was just starting its MSc Program. The goals of the trip were to provide cardio-pulmonary resuscitation training to students and faculty; as well as, to set up an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a community hospital that was facilitating nursing experiences for the students at OACN.

Prior to my departure, during one of the many visits by Dr. Chockalingam to Saskatoon, a Memorandum of Understanding between the College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan (Mrs. Yvonne Brown, former Dean of the College of Nursing) and Omayal Achi College of Nursing (Dr. Chockalingam) was signed in the fall of 1994.

I left Saskatoon in February of 1995 not having met anyone from OACN but trusting that someone would pick me up in Singapore and Chennai. When I left, my children were 6 and 10 years of age, telecommunication was rudimentary and my mother had arrived to care for the children. I felt passionate about paying it forward and called to engage in this work and connect in ways not known to me at the time. I was picked up in Singapore by Dr. Chockalingam's sister-in-law and her family, and in Chennai by Mrs. Valli Alagappan.

I was able to have mannequins donated so that CPR training similar to what was going on in Canada could be undertaken. I had the opportunity to teach cardio-pulmonary resuscitation to many nursing students and faculty over time.

While I was there, I found that the knowledge translation of Nursing Procedures was handed down through oral tradition which meant that the students had nothing to refer back to. After much discussion, I began the process of writing the Nursing Procedures down as I listened, returned them to the Faculty for reflection and subsequently made appropriate changes. Although I began this process, it was completed by the Teaching Faculty at Omayal Achi College of Nursing and resulted in the Manual on Nursing Principles and Practice which was first published in 1999. The Manual has evolved over time but the content remains a core element of the curriculum both at OACN and in a number of other Colleges of Nursing in India.

In the fall of 1995, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Stroke Prevention, Epidemiology and Surveillance was approved by the World Health Organization, Health Canada and the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan. It was during the WHO Collaborating Centre's Summer School in 1996 that Dr. Chockalingam approached Dr. David Popkin (former Dean of the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan) about the possibility of establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Omayal Achi College of Nursing and the College of Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. The MOU was subsequently signed in August, 1997 in Saskatoon during the WHO Collaborating Centre's Summer School in 1997 and in December, 2007 in Chennai, India. Within this context, it was an honour to facilitate the visit of Dr. KR Rajanarayanan (Member, Governing Council, OACN) to the Summer School in 1997.

As a result of the MOU, an Exchange Program was established that would:

1. Facilitate an intercultural experience which will enhance understanding of diversity through respectful approaches to communication and disease management.
2. Engage in primary health services in an interdisciplinary setting with supervision.
3. Enhance collaboration both cross-culturally and internationally.

In July, 1998, eight undergraduate medical students went to India with little or no supervision from the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan. This was found to be less than optimal for Omayal Achi College of Nursing. As a result, Dr. Popkin approached me about designing an Exchange Program that included a research component. Thus, in December of 1998, an evaluation was undertaken which resulted in an evidence-informed Exchange Program. From 1997-2014, 36 undergraduate medical students and a Family Medicine Resident participated in the Exchange Program. The strengths of the Exchange Program were: the cultural experiences; seeing pathology that is not seen in Saskatchewan; building relationships with the people; building relationships with colleagues; and, being able to see the similarities and differences in our health care systems, management of diseases, education and research. The challenges were: culture shock; "hurrying just to wait"; "a little more freedom" was desired; anti-malarial drugs; and, not being heard when negotiating a desired change in the schedule (others knew best).

In addition to the Student Exchange Program being facilitated by OACN in Chennai, the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon facilitated an Exchange Program for Governing Council Members and Faculty from Omayal Achi College of

Nursing. From 1997 until today, six individuals have had the opportunity to visit the University of Saskatchewan for a period of time.

In addition, in 2008 a MOU was signed between Omayal Achi College of Nursing, Chennai, India and the Department of Academic Family Medicine, University of Saskatchewan, from which the International Centre for Collaborative Research (ICCR) evolved. This Centre which is housed within Omayal Achi College of Nursing in Chennai, India continues to strive towards strengthening the concepts and application of research methods and research ethics for those sponsored or supported by the Centre.

I would like to pay tribute to the following individuals for their dreams and contributions to the work undertaken by Omayal Achi College of Nursing: AMM Arunachalam Chettiar; Mrs. S Narayanan; Mrs. Yvonne Brown; and, Dr. David R Popkin. Although these individuals are no longer with us, their contributions live on in the lives of the students and alumni.

My personal and professional life would not be the same without my engagement with the OACN family. They have supported me in many ways over the years as I: raised my children; undertook a PhD; became a Tenured Faculty Member in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan; and, became a grand-mother. In turn, I hope they too have benefited from my many visits to Chennai and OACN; as well as, the questions asked by the medical students and the Family Medicine Resident.

As indicated by Henry Ford², coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. This has been a very successful endeavour that resulted in my becoming a member of the OACN family.

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