

'I really worked hard'

"Students should be motivated with a purpose," believes ace surgeon K.M Cherian

■ GEETA PADMANABHAN



One of the reasons for my success was the support from my alumni, including my teachers. We all keep in touch and refer patients to each other.

only Indian member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery.

His surgical gifts go hand-in-hand with his unfailing compassion. In his appeal to the Iraqi abductors of three Indians, the President of India cited Dr. Cherian's humanitarian gesture of operating on 20 Iraqi children with complex congenital heart defects. Excerpts from an interview.

Surgical risks

I was well qualified and trained in cardiac surgery before I

ever, my biggest ordeal was forming a team.

Life in med school

The college had the best teachers in medicine, in this country. Prof. MP Pye and Dr. Lokesh Pye literally threw me into cardiac surgery. Prof. SR Ullal was my mentor in cardiac surgery. He was an excellent teacher, a super-technical surgeon and an intellectual giant. College years were mostly fun and play. But when I worked, I worked really hard. All students stayed in the hostel, initially. Then, we rented houses and hired a cook. We had many hobbies and interests. I am not sure about medical college students today. Maybe they just study without an actual look at life.

Choice of surgery

As a school student, I was fascinated by the sight of a beating heart and hence dissected many lizards, frogs, and so on. I was interested in anatomy. As a pre-medical student, the first surgery I witnessed was a patent ductus arteriosus (PDA). The patient died on the table.

We are one of the closest alumni associations. We have our own group on WhatsApp. One of the reasons for my success was the support from my alumni, including my teachers. We all keep in touch and refer patients to each other.

Students should be motivated with a purpose. The harder you work, the luckier you become. In the words of renowned graphics artist MC Escher, "Only those who attempt the absurd will achieve the impossible."

If someone wrote an exhaustive book on Dr. KM Cherian, his "firsts" would occupy a whole chapter. Once he got his MBBS/MS from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore/Manipal, FRACS at Royal Australasian College, Sydney, and DSc (Hon.) from Dr. MGR Medical University, Chennai, he plunged into his "firsts-in-cardio-thoracic-surgery" pro-

gramme. Starting with the first successful coronary artery graft in India, in June 1975, he went on to wield his magic scalpel for a long list of "firsts" – first internal mammary artery graft in India, first correction of cardiac defects in children, first heart transplant after legislation on brain death, first paediatric heart transplant and first heart and

lung transplant – the list is never ending.

Honours, in the form of awards, memberships and degrees followed. His is the first and the only Indian name engraved in Kos Island, Greece, the birthplace of Hippocrates. He was the first Indian to be elected president of World Society of Cardio-Thoracic Surgeons (2010-11), the first and

returned from abroad, but it was difficult to start something (at the Railways hospital) where the infrastructure was poor or absent. There was no qualified cardiologist, no trained cardiac-surgeon, no perfusionist to operate the heart-lung machine, no trained anaesthetist. But, I had to do it because I strongly believed I was made for it. How-