

ROLE MODEL

Kunal Saha

The Ohio based HIV specialist and researcher tells **Adrian O'Dowd** how he has fought against medical negligence and corruption in his home country of India



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NOMINATED BY DAVID BERGER

"Kunal Saha has campaigned tirelessly against medical negligence cover-ups and healthcare corruption since 1998 when his wife died as a result of gross medical negligence in Kolkata.

His humility and relentless pursuit of doing what is right on behalf of the people of India against a famously corrupt medical and judicial establishment has been a huge source of inspiration to me. He also was of practical help in my unsuccessful attempt to get Ketan Desai removed as World Medical Association president in 2016-17.

Saha is the archetype of the humble, good person as opposed to so many people in positions of power in the medical establishment in India and elsewhere who seem more intent on furthering their own ends than representing the good of the people or the profession."

David Berger is a doctor at Broome Hospital in Western Australia

NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, their job title, and the reason for your nomination to arimmer@bmj.com

Kunal Saha says that being a good doctor should also mean being a good person. Originally from India, Saha is a private consultant in HIV and AIDS in Columbus, Ohio, and has been an adjunct professor at Columbus State Community College since 2007.

After qualifying in 1982 from Calcutta University, Saha migrated to the US in 1985. At that time, HIV and AIDS were becoming a significant health problem. "When I graduated, we had just started to learn about HIV, and I developed an interest and wanted to learn more," he says. "That's why, when I came to the US, I started to work on HIV and joined the University of Texas."

Saha completed a PhD from University of Texas in 1993 and did a postdoctoral fellowship at Columbia University in New York. He then joined Ohio State University as an assistant professor in 1998 to conduct research on HIV and AIDS.

Apart from his academic accomplishments, one of Saha's most important achievements has been the creation of a humanitarian

We are trying to spread awareness of patients' rights

organisation called People for Better Treatment (PBT) India in 2001, which is dedicated to eradicating medical corruption in the country.

The idea came after Saha's wife Anuradha (pictured with him below), died aged only 36, following a drug allergy while the couple was visiting India in 1998. Anuradha was treated by a senior physician in Kolkata who gave her too high a dose of the wrong steroid which led to her death.

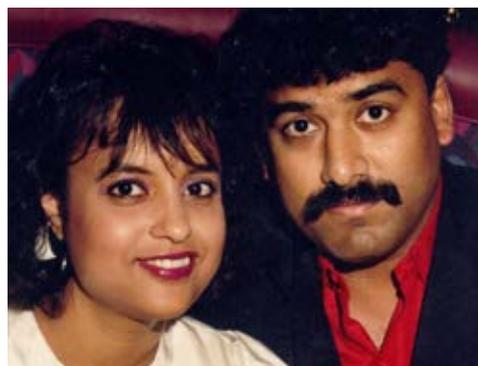
Saha filed a medical malpractice suit against the doctors involved. In 2009 the Supreme Court of India held that there had been medical negligence. The court found the four doctors and the Advanced Medicare Research Institute in Kolkata guilty of negligent treatment causing death. The courts later awarded Saha the equivalent of around \$2m (£1.6m) and he decided to use it for the promotion of better healthcare in India. Since then, PBT India has fought for many families that have experienced medical negligence and tackled medical corruption in the country.

"I was completely devastated when my wife died but I realised that this kind of medical negligence was rampant in India," says Saha. "People were dying because there was no accountability for negligent doctors.

"The situation was really bad then, but it has started to change and we're trying to spread public awareness about patients' rights and doctors' responsibilities. Things are different today but it is a very long journey."

Adrian O'Dowd, London

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Jenny Vaughan, 50, is a consultant neurologist in London. She is a leading campaigner for reforming the law on gross negligence manslaughter when applied to people working in healthcare. She articulated the unease many people felt at the conviction of the surgeon David Sellu and, as campaign chair for his appeal, was instrumental in getting his conviction overturned. Along with Sellu's legal team she is widely credited for having modernised the law in this area. She has been equally vocal in defence of Hadiza Bawa-Garba and was a leading supporter of her successful bid against erasure. Vaughan's contributions helped shape the conclusions of the Williams review in June 2018. She now campaigns for a "just culture" in healthcare and for improvements to patient safety by working with the Doctors' Association UK (DAUK) and the BMA. In 2018 she received the BMJ editor's award for speaking truth to power.

BMJ CONFIDENTIAL

Jenny Vaughan

Overturning injustice

What single change would you most like to see made to the NHS?

Patient safety should always come first. We need to bring in a truly just culture so that errors are discussed openly and everyone can learn from mistakes.

How is your work-life balance?

Better than it was. Being a workaholic isn't the right way to get the most out of life.

What was your best career move?

Leading the group of David Sellu's friends as we launched a campaign to overturn his conviction for gross negligence manslaughter. The result was extraordinary.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

Letting my own health fail while working too hard.

How do you keep fit and healthy?

I developed breast cancer in 2017, and this has made me much more serious about keeping fit. Last summer I ran my first 5k in 37 years.

If you weren't in your current position what would you be doing instead?

Helping to solve global warming. I want our children to "inherit the Earth."

What book should every doctor read?

Complications by Atul Gawande. It's a masterful reflection on how mistakes occur in medicine, with practical suggestions to reduce error. He states that medicine is equally "complicated, perplexing, and profoundly human."

What would you say to your former student self?

Worry less, sleep more, and have fun. Keep your sense of humour and take calculated risks, always believing that the impossible can happen.

What personal ambition do you still have?

To continue to improve patient safety by working closely with patients and healthcare professionals. All of us at DAUK, along with my neurologist buddy David Nicholl, have now launched the campaign Learn Not Blame.

Where are or when were you happiest?

Apart from my wedding and the births of my two children, it was during a recent trip into the Omani desert with David and Catherine Sellu. In the moonlit silence, we realised that our optimism about the future had begun to return.

Do doctors get paid enough?

We don't do this job for the money, but the answer has to be no, because of all of the unpaid hours and the huge responsibility. Current working conditions and the lack of a family life are adding to the crisis in recruiting and retaining junior doctors.

What new technology or development are you most looking forward to?

A cure for advanced breast cancer. My own recurrence risk is uncomfortably high, and fear of progression is an unfortunate reality for those of us with this disease.

Is the thought of retirement a dream or a nightmare?

At the moment it's a wonderful dream, as getting there will mean that I've survived against the odds. But there's plenty more work in me, and I still wish to look after patients for the time being.

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