BMJ AWARDS SOUTH ASIA 2015

Stories of South Asian clinical excellence: who won the 2015 BMJ Awards?

What do you get when BMJ meets Bollywood? Jeetha D’Silva was at the awards ceremony last week to recognise the heroes doing outstanding work in healthcare throughout the region.

Jeetha D’Silva journalist, Mumbai

The conclusion of the inaugural BMJ Awards South Asia saw medical excellence meet Bollywood glamour, in an evening that was inspiring and entertaining in equal measure. On 30 October the Grand Ballroom at The Leela in Mumbai was packed with practitioners from throughout South Asia who had gathered to honour the heroes who are making outstanding contributions to healthcare in the region.

And while the spotlight stayed on the incredible work being done, Siddharth Kannan, a well known television and radio presenter and the host for the evening, brought some Bollywood moments to the proceedings by making the crowd dance and getting some members of the audience to sing the song Lungi Dance from the Hindi film Chennai Express.

Bollywood spirit

Kamran Abbasi, international editor at The BMJ, also got into the Bollywood spirit. “We expect Sholay [meaning “embers,” referring to the classic film] and Jazbaa [meaning “passion,” and the title of another popular Hindi film],” he said, speaking at the ceremony. Abbasi, who was on the jury panel, said that the quality of entries was very high and therefore to be shortlisted was a triumph.

Abbasi also spoke of BMJ’s long association with the medical community in the South Asian region. “Health is the route to prosperity and peace,” he said. “We know you share our goals for a healthier world,” he told the gathering of doctors.

Abbasi also announced that The BMJ is making content published in the South Asia channel of the journal free to access online for six months.

Winners got the loudest cheers

“The awards reflect our desire to recognise and showcase excellence in the practice of medicine in South Asia. The nominations that we received this year truly added credence to the stature of the awards,” said Tim Brooks, chief executive of BMJ. “We hope the awards this year showcase the most spectacular achievements of doctors in South Asia and help the winners and the finalists receive the acknowledgment they truly deserve.”

The loudest cheers went to the winners, who were selected from 36 finalists in 12 categories. The finalists had been shortlisted through a rigorous process from over 900 entries received from all parts of South Asia.

Every nomination was screened and filtered based on how well it tackled the defined problem, its potential impact on improving healthcare outcomes, relevance to the region, novelty, and scalability. The final shortlist had nominations from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, reflecting the great work being done throughout the region.

An expert jury

A day before the ceremony, the finalists were invited to present their work to a jury that comprised experts in medical practice, research, and academia from around the world. Jury members reviewed and thoroughly questioned the finalists about their projects before selecting the winners.

The winner of the Medical Team of the Year Award was the R Madhavan Nayar Center for Comprehensive Epilepsy Care from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, for its work in the diagnosis, treatment, and awareness of epilepsy. This team stood out because of its comprehensive approach to the welfare of people with epilepsy. The centre helps more than 6000 patients each year. It provides evaluation of newly referred patients and review of patients having treatment in two clinics and holds outpatient sessions to evaluate speech disorders, neuropsychological concerns, occupational needs, and behavioural problems. It also offers counselling.

Ashalatha Radhakrishnan, additional professor at the centre, told the jury that the service offered was of a similar standard to that offered in the West—but at substantially lower cost. The jury debated extensively on this category, which had another strong contender that is doing exceptional work: the Institute
The BMJ

of Liver and Biliary Sciences in New Delhi. The R Madhavan centre won by the narrowest of margins. The jury summed it up: the epilepsy programme tackles an unmet healthcare need in the region; the multidimensional aspects of this project consider lives in the community; and the team has an enormous amount of dedication that shines through on this project.

Speaking to The BMJ after the ceremony, Radhakrishnan said that winning meant a lot to her and the team. “This recognition will help us build on our work, and we hope it will benefit many more patients,” she said.

Patients are the inspiration

The Surgical Team of the Year Award went to the head and neck surgical oncology team at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Kochi, Kerala. Subramania Iyer, clinical professor and head of the team, received the award for the team’s hand transplant programme.2 A delighted Iyer received a rousing applause when he said that patients were the inspiration for his team.

Winners in three of the 12 categories were from Sri Lanka. One of these was the paediatric cardiology team at Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children in Colombo, winner of the Cardiology Team of the Year Award. Duminda Samarasinge, consultant paediatric cardiologist, said that the accolade was testimony to the team effort at the unit. “This award goes to every member of the team,” he said.

The Diabetes Team of the Year Award went to Nihal Thomas and the Vellore diabetes team, an initiative of the department of endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism at the Christian Medical College, Vellore, for its work that has brought demonstrable impact to the delivery of diabetes care in the area. The Pulmonology Team of the Year Award was presented to Sundeep Salvi, director of the Chest Research Foundation in Pune, and his team for their work to improve healthcare delivery in pulmonary medicine through medical education and quality research.

Needles of any gauge

Ajay Aurora, director of the Delhi Retina Centre, won in the Innovation in Healthcare category for his indigenously developed device—the Aurora needle trocar cannula system—used in microincision vitrectomy surgeries. “This system offers several advantages over the system that is currently being marketed by multinational companies,” Aurora told The BMJ. “It is an ideal cannula system. It is cost effective and can be adaptable to needles of any gauge. By comparison, the system that is available in the market can be used only with specific gauge needles. The device is also environmentally friendly as it can be autoclaved and reused.”

Aurora hopes that the recognition will bring more awareness about the device, which “will result in huge savings in procedure costs,” he said. If all microincision vitrectomy surgeries in India were to be conducted with this technology, we might save Rs1bn (£10m; €14m; $15m) a year, he has estimated. “These savings can be passed on to benefit patients.”3

The Excellence in Medical Education Award was given to the faculty of medicine at the University of Colombo for its project “Developing and incorporating a module on professionalism and ethics in medical post graduate training in Sri Lanka.”

M Madhuwanti Dissanayake, a senior lecturer at the university, said that she was happy with the recognition. “This project will receive a boost thanks to the BMJ Award. Professionalism and ethics should be given due importance in postgraduate medical education. I hope with this award, this project will be a role model for postgraduate medical training in South Asia,” she said.

Dissanayake also said that she was pleased that three of the 12 winners were from Sri Lanka. “It shows that the healthcare work being done in our country is of a good standard,” she said.

A daring effort

The winner in the Quality Improvement in Healthcare category was Manju Mani, head of cardiac anaesthesiology at Saket City Hospital, New Delhi, for her research, “Safe reprocessing of single use devices (SUDS) in cardiac surgery: a quality improvement initiative.” Mani’s work impressed the jury, who hailed it as highly relevant to the South Asian context. The jury thought it was a daring effort and that this reality check on the reuse of some specific single use devices would have implications for patient care in the long term.

The Research Paper of the Year Award went to Sunit Singhi and team from the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, for the submission entitled “Randomised controlled trial comparing cerebral perfusion pressure targeted therapy versus intracranial pressure targeted therapy for raised intracranial pressure due to acute CNS infections in children.”4

Anbarasan M, of Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, won the Postgraduate Thesis of the Year Award for his research work in improving drug safety in intensive care units. The research focused on identifying types of drug errors and developing strategies to overcome them. A follow-up study found a reduction of more than two thirds in drug errors.

“Receiving the BMJ Award in the first step of my research journey is very exciting. But more than winning, the award provided an excellent opportunity to meet many senior doctors and hear about their work,” Anbarasan told The BMJ.

The Healthcare Advocacy Award went to the Mohan Foundation, Hyderabad, for its advocacy in the area of organ donation. The foundation has been instrumental in raising public awareness about organ donation, training healthcare professionals in transplant coordination, and trying to influence policy makers to pass favourable legislation that will help increase organ donations in India.

A fiercely competitive category

Healthcare Journalist of the Year, a fiercely competitive category, had two winners—Mahesh Rajaasurya, of the faculty of medicine at the University of Colombo, and Rema Nagarajan, of the Times of India.

Prashant Jha, senior editor, South Asia, at The BMJ, said, “This year, the BMJ Awards grew in scale, in quality, and in their reach. I had the advantage of going through everyone’s work in 2014 and 2015, and this year the quality of submissions had gone up and so had the diversity of submissions.

“The quality of work presented by the finalists was outstanding. The jury had a tough job selecting the best, and in many categories the scores were close.

“I am very happy that we are not importing healthcare solutions from outside. People are looking within for solutions. They are asking themselves, ‘Can I do something that is absolutely frugal and hence it is scalable in my part of the world?’

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“To some it may seem that healthcare in South Asia has a lot of challenges. I am delighted that there are doctors and healthcare teams who say we have a lot of opportunity.”

**Stories of excellence**

Prashant Mishra, managing director of BMJ India, said, “The awards have received a phenomenal response from doctors and healthcare professionals across South Asia and have helped to bring to the forefront stories of excellence in healthcare in the region.

“We are thankful to doctors for their support and hope that the BMJ Awards South Asia have helped to provide recognition to the true stars of South Asian healthcare.”

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