Enhancing nursing

A new structure on the Bel-Air campus will now house its College of Nursing

Arnaz S. Mama

“The college is not just the building. It is the institution where all of you, spirited, enthusiastic young students and teachers gather together for the purpose of educating yourselves and each other and acquiring knowledge. This building is what makes it possible for you to come together — to learn and play and work together. This is where you will acquire the latest in the arts and sciences of healing and then apply it to help those in need, without prejudice, and to the best of your ability.”

Dr. Mehroo Patel’s advice to the 78 young student nurses of the Bel-Air College of Nursing came straight from the heart. Patel, now a grandmother, had interned under premier thoracic surgeon Dr. Bomi Billimoria — son of Bel-Air’s visionary founder Dr. Rustom Billimoria. Speaking at the inauguration of the College building on the Bel-Air Hospital complex in Panchgani on December 9, 2007, marked more than a homecoming for Chicago-based Patel. Her role as facilitator for the creation of this College demonstrated a surge of joyful thanksgiving for the 94-year-old institution that had seen the launch of her own career.

Now in its second year, the College provides a four year degree program in general and HIV specific nursing and envisages growth to the masters degree from the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, Nashik. A reciprocal arrangement with the Ruby Hall Hospital in Poona provides practical experience in general medicine for Bel-Air nurses while Ruby Hall nurses will avail of Bel-Air facilities in HIV care. Also participating in the program is the Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences, a deemed university in Karad. The College of Nursing of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is offering curricular support.

Bel-Air, the sanatorium and hospital founded in 1913 for tuberculosis (TB) patients, then as shunned by society as HIV/AIDS sufferers in our own time, had been handed over by Billimoria to the Indian Red Cross Society in 1964 to ensure its survival as an institution. Once internationally recognized as a haven for the TB afflicted, discovery of a simple cure for the disease had led to the neglect of the institution until a young Catholic priest, Fr. Tomy Karyilakulam of the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS), took on the mantle.

Clockwise from ext L (L to R): Fr. Tomy; Mehroo Patel and Sr. Martha flank Mangal Anchan cutting the ceremonial ribbon; Honai Modi receiving UIC plaque from Minu Patel; the College façade
the onus of administering the sprawling campus with its 60+ decrepit structures in 1994. With the backing of the Indian Red Cross Society, Maharashtra State Branch, and its honorary secretary Homai Modi and the MCBS, Tomy successfully turned the institution around to address the crying need of the HIV-AIDS afflicted. That it is now one of the topmost hospitals in India in that field was attested to by the personal visit of then President of India Dr Abdul Kalam on its 90th anniversary in 2003. When Patel read of the revival of Bel-Air in Parsiana (October 2003), she and her husband Dr Minu Patel visited Panchgani to see what they could do to help. Tomy, now director of Bel-Air who chairs the Technical Resource Group of the National AIDS Control Organization

Donating service

In a brief interview with Parsiana after the event Drs Mehroo and Minu Patel were keen to promote nursing as a career option for Parsi youth, both male and female. Their concern was born of the question of reserving seats for Parsis at the College. “In Illinois nurses work part time and (study) for MSc and PhD degrees. They work at the same level as doctors do... In the US there are no water-tight compartments in education,” he noted, citing the example of a nurse who completed her PhD in nursing and went on to acquire an MD in obstetrics and gynecology. “There is more to nursing than giving bedpans!” says Minu who believes that the time to create interest is at the 9th and 10th standard levels in school. “If explained well, our kids could pick it up. In the past we had excellent Parsi nurses. If you plant the seeds now, they may fructify in 10 to 15 years,” he adds.

The Patels have already targeted Yasmin Charna, matron of the boarding section of the Bai Avabai Petit Girls’ School in Bandra, as they believe several successful nurses in the past had emanated from that institution. Mehroo referred to a program in the US where students volunteered to work in hospitals during their holidays. Though the program there has been discontinued because of certain legal implications, Mehroo noted that it was “a good way to introduce the youth to healthcare careers.”

The commemorative jashan

In 1956-59 Mehroo used to volunteer to teach nurses at Bombay’s B.D. Petit Parsee General Hospital, noted Minu. Minu himself has been teaching biometrics in Chicago to enable the nurses to understand statistical techniques in research oriented studies. Dean Joan Shaver of the UIC College of Nursing intends to arrange a program to honor Minu, now 77, Mehroo tells us. While on this visit, Minu has been trying to get 10 more computers for the Bel-Air College by appealing to various industrialists. One of his targets was IT professional Urwaksh Medhora of Ahmedabad. At the time we spoke, two were already in the pipeline, he noted.

He spoke of a program called BBBLACKBOARD@UIC which is a procedure for teaching through the Internet. However, though Bel-Air has the broadband facility, the program may be too expensive for Bel-Air to afford, he conceded.

The Patels’ other concern has been to find subsidized transportation of medical books from Chicago to Panchgani. The books are donated by UIC teachers who often jettison the older editions when presented with new ones by the publishers. They say that Purush Dada bhoy of Chicago has been collecting these books and journals and packing them in boxes which Tomy’s cousin picks up and sends to India. “Donation as money is fine but it can also come in the form of service,” declare the service oriented couple.
rashtra State Branch has put Bel-Air on the world map...The quality and merit of Bel-Air has been proved by Fr Tomy being made chairman of the National AIDS Control Project.”

Complimenting the Indian Red Cross Society, Fr Tomy and his team, Mangal Anchan, registrar of the Maharashtra State Nursing Council commented on the College seats being fully occupied while in other institutions the seats remained vacant. “The product passing out of this institution will be genuine,” she noted. Dr Sujata K, registrar of the 25-year-old Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences at Karad — a multi-disciplinary hospital plus nursing and medical college — promised to continue the collaborative linkage with Bel-Air.

Presenting a report on the College which has been operating since October 26, 2006, its principal Sr Martha T. of the congregation of Jesus Mary Joseph noted that the first batch of 40 students had completed their first year exam and were awaiting their results. A second batch of 38 had taken their place. She spelled out the philosophy of the institution: to enhance the quality of nursing to international levels as also to build the moral, psychological, cultural and spiritual attributes of her students. Aiming to inculcate a desire for “service and care with love,” she noted that the aim was to promote professional and personal values. Martha had visited the UIC in April 2006 to learn about US nursing systems. She was also very appreciative of Chicago resident Porus Dadabhoy who was facilitating the collection and transfer to India of medical books and journals for the college library. A team of qualified visiting professors was now in place, she added.

Minu Patel read out the message from Joan Shaver, professor and dean of UIC College of Nursing, and presented a plaque on her behalf. “Graduates of the Bel-Air College of Nursing will be much in demand in this time of a global nursing shortage,” Shaver noted, adding, “Please know that we are motivated to be partners with the Bel-Air College of Nursing into the future, hopefully to share with each other many opportunities to grow and prosper each of our programs over time...From the first feasibility visit for curriculum consultation by Dr Karen Solheim of our College to now as the opening of a new building, we are impressed with the rapid and remarkable progress in creating a new high quality school of nursing.”

The establishment of an Endowment Fund for the Advancement of Nursing Education in India established by the Patels at UIC had borne the financial cost of Solheim’s feasibility study as well as the trips of Martha and Tomy to Chicago to interact with the UIC College of Nursing. “You are ordinary people doing extraordinary things,” Mehroo Patel told the student nurses. Dedicating the event to the memory of father and son Drs Rustom and Bomi Billimoria she noted, “The founder of Bel-Air Dr Rustomji was fondly known as the father of tuberculosis east of the Suez Canal and Bel-Air can be among the best in nursing education (institutions) worldwide. It is you who will make it such. There are others like ourselves who will support you and provide the right environment.”

Urging the young candidates to acquire a research oriented mentality Mehroo continued: “Applying research done in the West or elsewhere is one thing but it is entirely a different experience to do research for your own population in their environment with their diseases and disease fighting ways and means. Uniquely important are the socio-

Alongside (L to R) Minu Patel, Mangal Anchan, Mehroo Patel, T. S. Jayalakshmi, Sujata K, Sr Martha and Homai Modi Center: Dummies to practise on

Students and staff of the College
cultural, religious and economic differences. The most significant aspect of your research will be to achieve your goal with less finance, less expensive medicines, tests and technologies for those individuals who are disadvantaged. We hope that after you finish your education you will apply your knowledge and training to serve those most in need in India first and then in other developing countries.”

Initial prayers were offered by the student nurses at the start of the program. This was later followed by a cultural program presented by them. On the eve of the inaugural a jashan had been held on the Hospital campus dedicated to Rustumji and Bomi Billimoria where most of the remaining Parsi residents of Panchganj had attended. Among them were Kate and Mona Irani whose father Jal Irani had started the Boat Club in Mahabaleshwar; Veerzad, Noshir and Veera Khambatta of Mount View Hotel; Naval Jalal and Nilofer Mahabaleshwarwala of Dina Hotel; retired Captain Shahrukh Bhatena who now works at St Peter’s School as account manager but whose father had served at Bel-Air for 45 years; Kersi and Khoshboul Tamboli, trustees of the Panchganj Anjuman which had helped Modi organize the ceremony. The dwindling size of the anjuman which once had dominated the Mahabaleshwar-Panchganj scene cast an air of nostalgia over the gathering.

In his vote of thanks Tomy acknowledged the “unflinching support” of Kersi Gherda, chairman of the Maharashtra State Branch of the Indian Red Cross Society, and of Modi, found it “difficult to thank Minu and Mehroo” and noted fervently that “the great Dr Billimoria and Bomi continue to be our inspiration.”

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accounts for the year ended March 31, 2007, forwarded to Parsiana by SPP president Darayas Master. The income during the year, Rs 2,68,57,259, accrued largely from investments, Rs 84,25,192, donations from trusts, individuals and grants for food, Rs 29,58,928, and rents, Rs 8,65,153. While expenses in respect of properties totalled Rs 10,09,025 the other major expenses incurred were on education Rs 1,17,97,843, medical relief Rs 12,90,305, relief of poverty Rs 25,66,385 and other charitable objects, Rs 18,59,301.

The SPP runs a number of educational institutions. Of these, the corpus of the Surat Parsi Orphanage rose to Rs 1,26,32,097 from Rs 1,12,36,828 in the previous year. Rs 1,19,834 was spent on repairs and maintenance while Rs 17,81,502 was used for educational expenditure. The Nariman Parsi Girls’ Orphanage recorded an increase in corpus from Rs 1,18,49,736 in the previous year to Rs 1,20,05,867 in the year under audit. Rs 98,356 was spent on repairs while the expenditure incurred on education amounted to Rs 25,17,810. Similarly, the corpus of the Bai P. M. Patel Singanporewala English School rose from Rs 10,68,598 to Rs 23,10,659. This institution incurred an expenditure of Rs 13,96,779 on education. However, the corpus of the Seth K. H. Alpaiwala Industrial Institute for Women and Girls decreased from Rs 1,49,097 to Rs 1,12,125, its largest expenditure being on education, Rs 46,476.

The Seth Sorabji Nauserwanji Parukh Polytechnic Institute started its year’s operations with a corpus of Rs 1,09,444.

The Nariman Home and Infirmary, the Seth R. D. Tarachand Parsi General Hospital and the Bai G. N. Mehta Maternity Hospital take care of the medical needs of the community. The corpus of the Nariman Home and Infirmary increased to Rs 4,10,07,028 from Rs 3,86,37,348 in the previous year, as did that of the Bai G. N. Mehta Maternity Hospital from Rs 1,00,526 to Rs 5,07,370. The Seth R. D. Tarachand Parsi General Hospital too showed an appreciation in corpus from Rs 3,11,11,307 to Rs 3,32,82,428. The Nariman Home and Infirmary recorded its largest expenditure of Rs 9,78,187 on medical relief, the Mehta Maternity Home Rs 71,225 and the Tarachand Parsi General Hospital Rs 20,58,306 for the purpose.

The corpus of The First Dastur Mehrji Rana Trust Fund and The Dastur Darab Pahalana Trust Funds remained unchanged at Rs 10,50,484 and Rs 10,86,673 respectively, while that of the Sorabji Burjorji Dastur Darab Pahalana Trust increased from Rs 16,30,390 to Rs 16,36,456 in the previous year. These funds are used for extending medical relief, ameliorating poverty, educational and other charitable objects.

Compiled by Sherene Vakil