

Dr Suniti Solomon (1939-2015)



Dr Suniti Solomon, a mother, a wife, a medical professional, a professor, a scientist, an ethicist, and an advocate for rights, died on July 28, 2015, of cancer related complications at Chennai, India. She was 75.

We have had the honour and privilege of a very long association with Dr Solomon and to observe how she astounded everyone by her simplicity, her forthright approach, her enquiring mind, her compassion and her desire to do what was good, not merely what was right.

The intimation that her life had passed brought together a gathering so numerous that it was affecting, and yet comforting, that her memories survive in the hearts of the many she touched.

Dr Solomon had a brilliant academic record at the Madras Medical College, and was awarded several prizes. She trained in the UK and the US in pathology. After obtaining her MD, Microbiology, for over two decades she taught at her alma mater, loved and respected by her students and peers. She was known for her sharp intellect, her genuine interest in medical education, and the sincerity she brought to bear on any and all matters she was engaged in.

She lived a responsible and purposeful life. Few contributed more to HIV care than she did in India. Dr Solomon and her team documented the first evidence of HIV in India. After having established voluntary counseling and testing services, and the first HIV care centre at the Madras Medical College, she took voluntary retirement from her position of Professor of Microbiology, to establish the YR Gaitonde Centre for AIDS Research and Education (YRG CARE) in 1993.

YRG CARE, a premier not-for-profit institution, her greatest legacy, is amongst the largest in the voluntary sector that provides comprehensive care and support, and is a research and training institute of repute. Over twenty thousand persons living with HIV are registered at this Centre. Research was one of her passions, and

a focus area for the Centre. She constantly reminded all her colleagues that research should serve a higher goal, of a genuine, needed scientific pursuit, that would serve humanity both in the near and long term.

Dr Solomon served on a number of boards and scientific committees, including the state planning commission, and is often remembered for her intellectual honesty.

Dr Solomon was an early proponent of bioethics training. She never hesitated to recollect that she had obtained samples for HIV testing from the residents at the government vigilance home in Chennai, in 1986, without their consent. She would then deliberate on the concerted efforts she and YRG CARE have since made to learn and apply medical and research ethics.

Dr. Solomon strove to maintain the highest standards in research ethics. The YRG CARE IRB that was established in 1999 was the first in the NGO sector in India to be awarded the FERCAP SIDCER recognition in 2014.

She organised a research ethics workshop in Chennai way back in 2004, and the annual YRG CARE Bioethics Symposium (TYBS) since 2009. Her association with the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* began in 2005 when she was invited to deliver a plenary talk at the First National Bioethics Conference, in which she spoke on the ethical issues in HIV/AIDS care. Even a few months before her passing away, she delivered a lecture on "Research Misconduct" and "Country Regulations; Institutional Structure & Culture" organised by the US Department of Health and Human Services, at San Francisco.

Dr Solomon was married to the celebrated cardio thoracic surgeon, the late Dr Solomon Victor, and is survived by their son Dr Sunil Solomon, who lives in Chennai and Baltimore.

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