

# *A brief history of the* **Overseas Doctors' Association** *and the* **British International Doctors' Association** – *struggles & objectives*



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It is 45 years now since the establishment of the Overseas Doctors Association (ODA), now the British International Doctors Association (BIDA). The idea initiated by our 5 founding members now embodies the aspirations and ideals of all International Doctors. BIDA stands for the interests of International Doctors and highlights their problems. It is their voice, and its strong image provides a platform which represents the welfare of all International Doctors.

When we are looking at the history of BIDA, we will have to cast a brief glimpse into the history of overseas doctors in the United Kingdom.

## ***History of Overseas Doctors***

The greatest immigration of International Doctors started happening after the creation of NHS in 1948. It is worth highlighting that according to one historian, by 1945 there were no less than 1000 Asian doctors in Britain.

The NHS during the 1960's had come to be dependent on the practitioners recruited from overseas. In the training grades there were 8000 young, qualified doctors from overseas, 42% of that total, most of whom were expected to return home later. Early in 1974 the health Department said that, allowing of the many doctors who returned home each year, the maintenance and development of the NHS was dependent on the annual admission of between 2500 and 3000 doctors born overseas. UK medical schools produced 2289 medical practitioners in 1973. The number of overseas doctors practicing in the United Kingdom mostly in the NHS was gradually increasing.

Indeed, the dependence of NHS on overseas doctors became so great that in a debate in the House of Lords in 1961 Lord Cohen of Birkenhead commented on the fact that: *"The Health Service would have collapsed if it had not been for the enormous influx of junior doctors from such countries as India and Pakistan"*<sup>2</sup>. This statement is more accurate now, as the doctors from the South Asian sub-

continent are the architects of the present-day NHS and make up approximately 1/3rd of doctors practicing in the NHS.

While all this was taking place, the overseas Doctors were not organised. They came, after all, from a wide variety of places and by no means all shared the same cultural and religious backgrounds or medical education.

At the same time, when the NHS was recruiting more and more overseas Doctors, the personal and public complaints led to the GMC's concerns about whether the registration arrangements were adequate to ensure the competence of all those it registered. Taking all these things into account Sir Keith Joseph set a committee in 1972 on 'Regulation of the medical profession' under the chairmanship of Professor AW Merrison. Professor Merrison was a professor in Experimental Physics at Liverpool University and then later VC of Bristol University. The Merrison report was published on the 16th of April 1975 and was incorporated into the 1978 Medical Act. The Merrison report was very critical of Overseas Doctors, and only after that did TRAB and later the PLAB TEST came into existence.

In 1974, EEC medical directives were accepted by the Government of the UK. These directives were restrictive and discriminatory to all overseas-qualified doctors. But despite this the BMA raised no objection to them at all. This was indeed overt racial discrimination for the vast number of doctors who were supporting the NHS in the UK. Many overseas doctors had already acquired UK higher qualifications and many of them were British citizens. Doctors Chatterjee and Venugopal took this issue to the BMA, who were not really concerned and remained indifferent. Indeed, Dr. Satya Saran Chatterjee mentions in his memoirs that he received a letter from Dr Akram Sayeed to draw attention to the plights of young overseas doctors working in Britain<sup>3,4</sup>. This acted as a wake-up call for Overseas Doctors!

Shortly after the publication of Merrisons' report the Overseas Doctors realised that they would need to organise to gain proper recognition, and decided to form the Overseas Doctors Association (ODA).



## The history of ODA (BIDA)

In practice the ODA was composed predominantly by Doctors from the Indian Subcontinent, although the Association represented the interests of Doctors from all overseas countries.



*The late Dr S. Venugopal.*

On the 11th May 1975, a meeting was held in Birmingham at the house of the late Dr S. Venugopal which was attended by a handful of Overseas Doctors. The meeting's aim was to organise and launch the Overseas Doctors Association (ODA) in the UK as a representative body of all overseas doctors working in the United Kingdom. The five doctors present – the late Dr S Venugopal, the late Dr S S Chatterjee, the late Dr A K Admani, the late Dr A A Sayeed and the late Dr F S Hashmi – became founder members of the ODA. A working Committee was formed with Dr Akram Sayeed as Chairman and Dr. Satya Saran Chatterjee as its Vice President. This was the day when the ODA was officially launched. The ODA's aim

### Box 1: Time line of the initial history of ODA / BIDA

- 1975: 11th May - Official launch of Overseas Doctor's Association (ODA).
- 1975: 19th September - First conference of ODA was held in London.
- 1976: The first monthly ODA News Review was published from Leicester. The first editor of ODA News Review was Dr Sunil Bhattacharya.
- 1979: GMC elections were held under the new Medical Act. Four out of the ODA's seven candidates got elected including Dr Karim Admani, Dr Satya Chatterjee and Dr Venugopal.
- 1984: Dr. Krishna Korlipara was elected to GMC as a member. He continued to serve the council as a member for 25 years and while doing this he became the longest serving member of the GMC by the time of his retirement.
- 1985: 10th Anniversary of the ODA. A plaque was placed at Dr Venugopal's home in Birmingham, which is the birthplace of ODA.
- 1989: The first office was set up in 28-32 Princes Street, Manchester.
- 1991: The first International Congress by ODA was organised by the then newly elected General Secretary Dr Surendra Kumar. It took place in Delhi, India, was attended by 95 ODA members and the concept was designed to promote transcultural healthcare.
- 1994: Dr Shiv Pande was elected to the GMC council who later on became GMC treasurer, the first overseas Doctor to have been elected to that post.
- 1996: Dr Surendra Kumar was elected as ODA Chairman and initiated the project of acquiring ODA House.
- 1998: The ODA's constitution was changed.
- 1999: ODA House was acquired. The name of the ODA was changed to British International Doctors' Association (BIDA).
- 2000: Inauguration of ODA House on 25th May under the Chairmanship of Dr Surendra Kumar.  
The name of BIDA formally adopted after the Silver Jubilee in 2000.
- 2018: The first ever lifetime achievement award was given by BIDA to Dr Surendra Kumar.

was to put forward the point of view of overseas qualified Doctors and generally to look after their interests. The ODA had the effect of raising the consciousness of overseas qualified Doctors and gave them a platform to fight the discrimination in the NHS and GMC.

On 19th September 1975, the first conference of the ODA was held in London which was attended by 120 Doctors. This conference was a precursor to what would become an annual event called





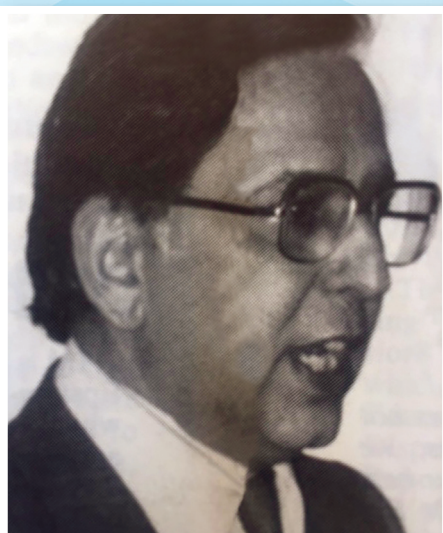
*The late Dr Akram Sayeed*



*The late Dr K Admani*



*The late Dr S S Chatterjee*



*The late Dr Farruk Hashmi, first President of the Overseas Doctors' Association, 1975 - 1977.*



*Above: 11th May 1985 – The unveiling of a plaque at Dr Venugopal's home in Birmingham commemorating the initial meeting at which the ODA was founded.*



*Dr S Venugopal (left) and Dr K Admani (below) pictured at the first ODA International Congress in New Delhi, India in 1991, being presented with commemorative awards and at a gathering of dignitaries (right).*







*Right: Dr Shiv Pande, Dr Surendra Kumar, the late Dr R Prasad, Mrs O'Driscoll, Dr S Venugopal and Mrs Karczewksa pictured at the first Conference of the ODA, London, 11th September 1975.*

Annual Representatives Meeting (ARM). The purpose of the ARM was to discuss the motions sent from different parts of the country, and the resolutions that were to be passed were to become the policy of the Association. Dr Satya Saran Chatterjee was elected as its Chairman, Dr Farrukh Hashmi as President and Dr Akram Sayeed as Secretary.

The ODA was immediately recognised by the UK Government, The Department of Health, The Royal Medical Colleges, the GMC and the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality). The ODA started dialogues with all of these organisations, and in turn the organisations began to understand the discrimination faced by overseas doctors on issues of training, promotions and job opportunities.

Over the years, the ODA established the rights of the overseas doctors. A few ODA leaders got elected to the council of the GMC. They convinced the GMC to hold the first part of the PLAB examination in the overseas doctors' own countries. This helped many doctors to come to the UK, after successfully completing Part 1 of the PLAB examination. Mr. Finlay Scott went to India to negotiate and set up PLAB part one examination to be held in India in February 1996.

BIDA has had stalwarts like Dr S N Verma and the late Dr Deepak Trivedi, initially as ARM Chairman and later as the President, who introduced vibrant discussions in the ARM meetings. These discussions generated numerous BIDA policies for the future. The contributions of Dr Ruben Prasad, Dr Raheem Khan, Dr Ramesh Gandhi, Dr Alam Ara Khan, Dr Ashok Kakkar, Dr MM Gupta, Dr Mrs Raj and Satish Ahuja, Dr Aftab Ahmed, Dr Anand Ahuja and several others were instrumental in building the foundation of the ODA.

Dr Surendra Kumar, who was elected as Chairman in 1996 and then President in 2002, led the organisation to new heights. He wanted to make the organisation more modern, forward looking and fit for the 21st Century. As the General Secretary of the ODA in 1991, he introduced the concept of International Scientific Conferences in different parts of the world to promote Transcultural health care. He also felt that overseas doctors needed a place for



ODA House

themselves and therefore raised funds to buy ODA House in Stockport which had its inauguration in May 2000. By this time many children of overseas doctors had started to graduate as doctors in the UK. It was considered that the ODA name would not be appropriate to reflect their status, and therefore the name of the organisation was changed to the British International Doctors' Association (BIDA).

With the help of Dr SS Sarkar and Dr RC Gupta the constitution was changed to modernise the organisation. BIDA News Review, which until then had been a free-standing organisation, was brought within the umbrella of BIDA. Its title was changed to BIDA Journal and it was made one of the standing committees of BIDA.

Dr Surendra Kumar was elected to GMC council in 1999 and became one of the Chairs of "Fitness to practice" panels. He continued in this role until 2016 and, during this period, he chaired one of the very highest profile and longest hearings of the GMC, lasting 3 years, concerning the MMR vaccine.

Our current Chairman, Dr C Kanneganti and President, Dr B K Sinha have been dynamic to raise their voices against injustices towards IMGs, and vehemently opposed the decision taken by the GMC with respect to Dr Bawa-Garba's case. This has made BIDA's relationship with the BMA, the GMC and the RCGP much stronger.

#### Box 2: Objectives of BIDA, as outlined in the Constitution of BIDA

The objectives for which the Association is established are: -

- (a) To promote the medical, dental and allied sciences and to promote and maintain the honour, interests and well-being of the medical and dental profession and in particular, but without prejudice, to the generality of the foregoing of those members of the medical and dental profession who received their medical and dental training.
- i) Outside the United Kingdom or who came to the United Kingdom for the purpose of receiving their medical and dental training, who were prior thereto resident outside the United Kingdom.
- ii) Within the European Union and resident in the United Kingdom and whose parents and/or grandparents were resident outside the United Kingdom and European Union.
- (b) To hold or arrange for the holding of, periodical meetings of the Members or the Association and of the medical and dental profession generally.
- (c) To provide a comprehensive counseling and career advice service to members of the Association or to any other members of the medical and dental profession or to any person desirous of practicing medicine and dentistry.
- (d) To circulate such information as may be thought desirable by means of periodical journal, which shall be the journal of the Association, or, by any other form of publication.
- (e) To promote a better understanding between members of the Association and local and central government, institutions and other bodies, whether professional or otherwise and the general public.
- (f) To co-operate with any company, association, public authority, or other body or person for the purpose of promoting the objects of the Association.

#### Box 3: How does BIDA achieve its' objectives?

##### PROTECTION

- Promotes the interests of Ethnic Minority doctors working in the UK
- To highlight and raise any difficult issues of the members to the government
- Support members in difficulty

##### COMMUNICATION

- BIDA Website
- Regular updates from BIDA Central Office

##### NETWORKING

- With the government, GMC, BMA and all other related organisations to influence change in policy and improve IMGs working environment.
- BIDA Divisional & Forum meetings, Annual ARM/AGM meetings

##### EDUCATION

- Regular BIDA Courses
- BIDA International Congress
- Forum Educational meetings
- BIDA Journal

##### ADVISORY SERVICE

- Mentoring to protect and promote IMGs career prospects
- Encourages equality of opportunities in education, training and careers.
- Endorses patient care of the highest standard.

#### The objectives of BIDA

BIDA encourages second generation International Medical Graduates qualified in the UK to join as members. BIDA, as an organisation, remains the voice of IMGs (International Medical Graduates) (Boxes 2&3). The central committee has been influential in having regular interactions with representative bodies like the BMA, the GMC, the Royal Colleges and with government ministers to influence policy making for recognition of the issues facing the IMGs. They encourage its members to gain representation in bodies such as the British Medical Association and the General Medical Council.

Doctors from the International community have been contributing to the NHS.<sup>5</sup> The story of International Doctors in Britain has not always been one of celebration. There have been numerous cases of discrimination and worse, and many of them were unable to enter or progress in high-profile medical streams.

BIDA remains committed to be the voice of IMG's.

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