

FAREWELL AIIMS



V.SRINIVAS*

Respected Director Prof Balram Airan, Distinguished Chiefs of Centers, Heads of Departments, Senior Faculty members and Ladies & Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the honor of a farewell party. I have a prepared text of my farewell address and I seek your indulgence to present my thoughts on my last working day in AIIMS.

1. It was mid November 2014 when I was informed that the Civil Services Board had hand-picked me for the post of Deputy Director (Administration) AIIMS and the approvals of the Appointments Committee of Cabinet are expected shortly. I was not very clear why the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had chosen an officer whose last 15 years in service were largely spent in public finance and international relations for a job in India's apex tertiary care medical institution. The AIIMS job is quite unique for the IAS as a stand-alone hospital-based job for a Joint Secretary level officer.
2. To understand the job requirements, I met Keshav Desiraju, P.K. Pradhan, P.K. Hota and Sujatha Rao all of whom had served as Health Secretaries. They were supportive and each had their own ideas on what I should be doing in AIIMS. The recommendations ranged from timely implementation of the Pradhan Committee report on inter-se seniority of AIIMS faculty, focus on establishing a COE on Public Health Policy, focus on strengthening tertiary care for non-communicable diseases and enhancing the contribution of AIIMS to affordable health care practices through additional budgetary devolutions.
3. I went to every department for introductory briefing meetings. The HOD's and Chiefs educated me in their areas of expertise. I tried to assimilate, into the ethos and work culture of the Institute, which has had a long and cherished history of excellence. There was much to learn, much to read and much to do. I read medical journals, visited laboratories and operation theaters, visited the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library to read the Rajkumari Amrit Kaur papers, her correspondences with Pandit Nehru and Dr. B.B. Dixit for establishing AIIMS, visited the Debates Section in Parliament Library to read every debate on AIIMS by Parliamentarians. I read all 3 volumes of the Collected Works of Dr. V. Ramalingaswami edited by Dr. P.N. Tandon in a lucid style that makes it extremely interesting reading.
4. Further the AIIMS has a repository of wisdom in Governing Body meetings. I carefully studied the discussions of all the 150 Governing Body meetings, and understood the governance challenges that each of the Directors faced. The AIIMS governance model is committee driven and entails significant process driven systems. Some of the processes are

tedious, and even the Central Secretariat's Manual of Office Procedures and the Allocation of Business Rules are more simplistic expressions of governance.

5. I found myself attending several meetings – meetings of the staff council, standing committees, coordination committees, Governing Body, Institute Bodies also Project Monitoring Committees, sub-committees of SFC and search cum selection committees. I was part of the lengthy 2-year exercise at revamping AIIMS governance model - the review of AIIMS Rules and AIIMS Regulations as part of the Venkitachalam Committee and subsequently the Prof Balram Airan Committee. Although simplistic models of governance for delegating authority and responsibility are available, the various committees that examined AIIMS Regulations - Valiathan, Pradhan, Sujatha Rao, Sneha Bhargava have all reiterated their faith in the Standing Committee based governance model of AIIMS. Yet I am left with the thought that decades of implementation of the Standing Committee based governance model at AIIMS have diluted authority from the post of Director AIIMS, while retaining huge responsibilities that the post is burdened with. It has become extremely challenging to administer the giant Institution, larger than several Ministries in financial resources through a standing committee based model of governance where consensus building takes time.

6. My job was very people driven. I kept getting mid-night emergency calls from senior colleagues requesting for assistance. A number of senior officials contacted me to assist their medical consultations at AIIMS. Saturdays were particularly crowded, and barely would I reach home, the telephone calls would begin. I always tried my best to help. AIIMS teaches compassion, takes away impatience and brings in a certain level of maturity to the way one sees life. It's a transformational experience in many ways.

7. There were many court cases. I had to attend meetings on holidays with the Solicitor General, Additional Solicitor Generals, Senior Advocates of Supreme Court and often visit Hon'ble Supreme Court, High Court of Delhi, Principal Bench of CAT for protecting AIIMS interests. AIIMS is being dragged into too much litigation, well beyond its capacities. Not only are employees filing court cases against the Institute but there are cases in the various Commissions where suo-moto cognizance is being taken on complaints. The litigation in appellate courts goes all the way upto the Hon'ble Supreme Court. If AIIMS is to avoid becoming the highest litigant Institution in Delhi, alternate ways of dispute resolution are needed.

8. For an autonomous Institution, AIIMS accountability to Parliament is very high. There are starred and unstarred questions, calling attention notices, zero hour mentions and appearances before many Standing Committees. I appeared as a witness before many Parliamentary Committees, making presentations on AIIMS Rules and Regulations, recruitment rules, implementation of reservation policy, women's empowerment issues and budgetary allocations. There are some areas where the Parliamentary oversight of AIIMS exceeds the executive oversight of AIIMS. This is a feature of the AIIMS Act, which contains provisions for such Parliamentary oversight of AIIMS. Even in 1956, several Parliamentarians felt that delegated legislation through Rules and Regulations conferred a lot of authority to the Institute and wanted AIIMS to be accountable to Parliamentary oversight, provisions for which were agreed to by Government.

9. When one works in an Institute where meritocracy thrives, results are bound to come. I did have my share of successes and recognition for working at the Institute. I enjoyed a cordial and constructive relationship with the President AIIMS and Union Health Minister J.P.Nadda, the 3 Health Secretaries that I have served with Lov Verma, B.P.Sharma and C.K.Mishra, 3 Joint Secretaries in Medical Education Sandeep Naik, Ali R Rizvi and Arun Singh. I was also part of many review meetings at the Prime Minister's Office where AIIMS was supported in many of our new initiatives.

10. At the Institute, I worked closely with 2 Directors, Prof M.C. Misra and Prof Balram Airan. When my administrative responsibilities became impossibly heavy, support was extended to me by Prof Minu Bajpai, Prof Maneesh Singhal, Prof Sanjeev Sinha and Prof Deepak Agarwal. I also worked very closely with Prof G.K.Rath, Prof Y.K.Gupta, Prof S.K.Panda, Prof S.K.Acharya, Prof S.C.Sharma, Prof S.K.Sharma, Prof D.K.Sharma, Prof T.S.Roy, Prof V.K.Paul, Prof O.P.Kharbanda, Prof Neerja Bhatla, Prof Amit Gupta and Dr. Sanjeev Lalwani on several AIIMS issues.

11. I had a dedicated team of officials working with me in my departments and in my personal staff without whom this journey was impossible. Smt Nani Gangadaran and Smt Meenakshi Sharma shouldered huge work-loads in my office.

12. I have a small gift for AIIMS on this occasion. The Governing Body minutes were poorly maintained, kept in bundles containing brittle 60-year old papers in seriously damaged condition. I restored them and today hand over the 3 volumes to the Director.

13. To conclude, I wish to thank Director AIIMS, all Deans, all Chiefs, all HOD's and all senior colleagues who have empowered me to sustain my enthusiasm and energy on this highly demanding job.

Jai Hind.

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*V.Srinivasan officer of 1989 batch of IAS, served as Deputy Director Administration AIIMS from
December 17, 2014 to March 21, 2017.*