



INTERVIEW

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**Dr. Raj Bhai
Shrestha**

Dr. Raj Bhai Shrestha was born on May 12th, 1940 in Kathmandu. After his preliminary education in Kathmandu, he proceeded to Government Dental College, Bombay University where he completed his study for Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) in 1964. As a part of further study, he also underwent postgraduate training in UK and West Germany. Dr. Shrestha belongs to the first generation of formal degree holders in the field of dentistry in Nepal.

Dr. Shrestha started his professional career as a dental surgeon in Mahendra Arogya Bhavan – a government Hospital in Birgunj. During the period, he was instrumental in establishing dental department and making it functional with necessary instruments & equipment in those days, it was enormously a difficult task in view of the acute constraints arising from the lack of financial and other physical resources, trained personnel and so forth. In addition, he also served in several other hospitals in Kathmandu. He conceived and formulated a ten-year mobile dental team plan, which was approved by the government and subsequently implemented in Surkhet and Dharan. In recognition of long and meritorious services His Majesty the King and the government honored him with awards and decorations.

Dr. Shrestha retired from HMG service in 1995 after rendering services for about three decades. Since then, he remains active in various social services and activities.

The following is an excerpt of the interview taken with Dr. Shrestha

Sir, how would you describe the conditions of dental service after your return to Nepal ?

There were very few dental surgeons with BDS degree in those days. I was among the three dental surgeons with a formal degree. Other two were Dr. Buddhi Man

Shrestha and Dr. Mesh Bahadur Shrestha. There was practically no awareness with the people that they should go to the professional doctor for treatment of dental diseases. The services in those days were provided by a few but formally untrained practitioners who have been practicing dentistry in traditional

method.

How did you start your practice then ?

It is a long history; nonetheless quite interesting. After the return from my studies, I joined health services in July 1964 as a dental surgeon. I was initially posted to Narayani Zonal Hospital at Birgunj where I worked for 2 years. In 1966, I went to UK for Post-Graduate training in general dentistry. After my coming back from UK, I continued my practice in Nepalgunj hospital for 6 months and then I joined Bir hospital in Kathmandu and continued to work there for 7 years.

In 1975, I was promoted to Class II officer and posted to Kanti Hospital, I worked there for another 4 years. I was then nominated for another postgraduate training in Periodontics in West Germany. I returned to Kathmandu after completing the training and again continued to work in Bir Hospital.

Did you also start your private practice ?

Yes, I did but not immediately. I started my private practice in Kathmandu only in 1968. At that time, I was reasonably sure of my competency to handle complicated cases on my own.

Do you feel that you had also contributed in the improvement of oral health scenario of the country ?

Yes I do. While I was working at Bir Hospital, I started operative dentistry

including RCT, replantation of the tooth and the periodontal surgery, besides other services to the patients at very nominal costs. This service became possible by the support and encouragement, which I received from my senior Dr. Basant Bahadur Shrestha, then head of the dental department. Actually, he was one of my *Gurus* in my profession.

You have had the experiences of working in both the public and private health institutions within the country and abroad. What differences did you find in their working ?

I worked for 28 years in government hospital and 10 years in mission hospital as a part time doctor at Shanta Bhavan. During my association with these institutions, what I found was that the mission hospital had relatively a lot more facilities in terms of instruments and other necessary equipment which were lacking in the government hospital. In addition, there were visiting dental doctors from abroad and to work with them is really a rewarding experience in terms of sharing the knowledge. And rather, working in mission hospital was missionary and was mercenary in government hospital.

What do you think should be the conditions of dental practice in Nepal ?

Dental science itself is a dignified profession on its own. It is a science and art where precision and perfection is greatly valued. In no circumstances, the personnel involved in this profession should compromise

with the quality of the service. Patients do not know what the doctors are up to but the doctors know how they are treating the patients. Professionals should maintain ethical values and should act to follow these ideals. In no way, the knowledge and experiences of the professionals should be allowed to use for personal gains. While at the same time, I am also aware that the government should also do part of its duty to maintain such a practice, which can flourish in the country.

Do you see any role of the dental association for the development of dental profession?

Of course, I do. I think the professional organization like NDA can do a lot to preserve and promote the values associated with such a profession while at the same time preserving the interests of the patients. The association should lead the interests of the professionals without compromising the quality of services whether in government or in private health institutions.

What are your plans for the future?

I take pride in being a member of this important community of this country; I will do whatever is possible on my part to promote the image and prestige of this profession.

Right now, I am involved in Kathmandu Medical College as a chief adviser and senior consultant. I am really keen to develop a well-equipped dental

faculty in the college to provide increasing need of the quality service.

How are you spending your days these days?

Currently, I am involved in various social services. Over the years, I have developed a taste for reading philosophy and other books, which helps me acquire a sense of direction and purpose in life. Incidentally, my days start with the chirping of the birds, which to me mean more than their songs. I sense in their songs a message for the entire day. I have different breeds of dogs that I begin to love as days go by as one of my most trusted friends. I also maintain a garden with a variety of flowers growing and spend time with pleasure in their upbringing. In addition, I always consider it a matter of pleasure and privilege to meet friends and well wishers. I am always delighted whenever I come across with right people.

What message would you like to give to the new generation dental professionals?

I happened to be one among those who always believe in honesty, sincerity and dedication to own profession. Whatever success I have been able to get during my long professional service is largely due to the importance, which I attach to these attributes. I am convinced that if the newer generations can come together unitedly to promote and preserve these ideals, I am sure, this will create a positive environment where the profession can thrive to the benefit of all.