



Our Distinguished Alumni – The story of Dr. Sulbha Arora, 1992 batch of AVM Santacruz.

The Head Nurse invited the sleep deprived, exhausted young doctor for a cup of coffee.

It had been 59 hours since she last tasted sleep and 59 continuous hours of non-stop emergencies at Bandra Bhabha hospital.

Nineteen normal deliveries, ten caesarean sections, preparation of patients, informing and obtaining consent from relatives, informing and coordinating with operation theatre staff, acquiring reports from pathology laboratories, coordinating with blood banks and numerous admissions had left the young woman physically drained.

She was suffering from a debilitating fever too! Instead of complaining or sympathizing with her present condition, the indefatigable young woman motivated herself by recalling the Hippocratic oath – all else comes second, your patient comes first! One could say she probably had an even greater responsibility. “Those days at Bhabha taught me that in obstetrics you’re responsible for not one but two lives!”

Rare is it to know what one is born to do, when the arrow of destiny, combines with talent and determination, to inexorably strike its mark. Sulbha’s life has been just that. As a child, she loved to study, making academic excellence her hallmark.

Her passion was so great that the space constraint of a joint family home wouldn’t impede her progress. She would study on the terrace, she would study in the bathroom and just about anywhere. Her choices of co-curricular activities at school unsurprisingly had an academic slant. She participated in debates, poetry recitations and quizzes, eventually winning the Bournvita quiz aired on radio!

Reminiscing of school brings forth fond memories of Mrs. Kapoor, her 5th Standard class teacher who continued to keep track of her progress in later years. The lesson she imbibed from her was the importance of focus. Miss Talwar, the Principal was a role model and disciplinarian. “In your formative years when discipline is strictly enforced, those habits mould you into what you are”, she says. The impact of emotional turmoil, hormonal changes and external influences was kept in check. As Head Girl in 10th Standard and Assistant Head Girl in 9th Standard, she watched Miss Talwar from close quarters.



The ethics that she follows in her work today stem from her upbringing and school has majorly influenced that. “You could go against your parents, not teachers”, she declares.



On finishing school, she chose science as her degree and developed a compelling interest in Biology, with Zoology as a sub-branch; becoming a doctor was her inevitable choice. Her clarity at a young age was admirable.

After her MBBS degree, she wanted to pursue gynaecology. At that time, she was an ardent feminist and women's issues were very close to her heart. "When you interact with women you get an insight into their domestic lives and you realize that not everyone is as fortunate. You realize that you want to make a difference in the lives of women. You find many victims of abhorrent domestic violence. I have personally attended to women who have suffered from full body burns and mutilated faces. You develop a desire to do something for them", says Sulbha.

So passionate was she about obstetrics, that she would study only gynaecology and obstetrics in her free time or be in the wards attending to only these patients. "The sights, smells and sounds that usually terrify people are home to me," she candidly announces. Could anyone be surprised when she got an outstanding score in her obstetrics-gynaecology subject in her final MBBS year?

Despite completing the arduous MBBS degree, there was much more still to accomplish. A DGO (Diploma in Gynaecology and Obstetrics) seat was available and she realised that it could be the only opportunity that may come her way. However, she decided to not short-change her career potential: she would settle for an MD seat or nothing at all. This risk-laden choice --- the odds of becoming an MD are miniscule – also meant that she would have to serve for one year in a rural area.

So she set off to Wakdi in Jalgaon for her rural stint. In doing so, she put on the line nothing less than her own personal safety and health. Jalgaon was notoriously known for its sex scandals at that time. What's more, she lived in unhygienic, rodent-infested accommodation with no water or electricity. Her mother would give her no alternative but to accompany her, despite Sulbha's father's ill health.

As proof that she was destined for her role, after her one-year mandatory rural India stint, she bagged the only MD seat for gynaecology in Mumbai available that year. As a result, she got into Bombay hospital for her three year MD training, of which one year was spent at Bandra Bhaba hospital. Her first job was working for Dr Gautam Allahbadia in his own IVF (In vitro fertilization) clinic.

What she believed was a temporary job, blossomed into her real passion and calling! In 2004, when she started her career, IVF was a completely novel, very dynamic, yet unconventional field. There were not more than three prominent clinics then throughout the city.

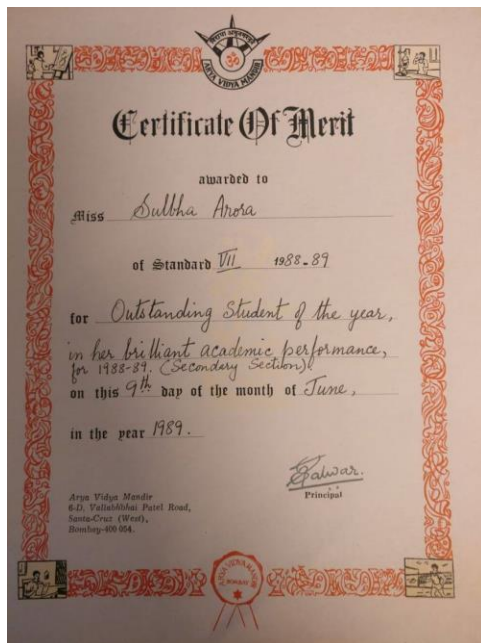


What appealed to her was sharing the joy of being able to make a difference. “The minute a couple get their positive pregnancy result, the difference it makes to their joy and stress levels is just amazing,” she gushes. Back in those days she was questioned on doing a job that potentially worsened the population boom, but she proudly expresses, “I wanted to help those who did not have even one child, as clearly they were not the ones causing that trend.”

As is often the case with a higher purpose, it is not you who chooses it, but get chosen by it to perform a special task. Recognised for her humane qualities and as a potential champion of women’s rights, Sulbha was appointed Scientific Director and the person in charge of a subsidized IVF clinic in 2008.

The clinic offered IVF at a fraction of the cost to financially disadvantaged families without compromising on the quality of treatment or equipment used.

The more and more she looks at her career, she views it as one of healing the psychological burdens of people and not just treating patients medically. The stigma that non-fertility carries in Indian society can be the source of tremendous family pressure, social pressure and marital discord. Her role involves extensive couple counselling and often not just on the subject of a child. Her rewards are the smiles and blessings she receives. On numerous occasions, she has been referred to as the ‘Godmother’ by her patients and has been requested to name their precious baby too!



Sulbha’s drive and motto in life has been akin to Lord Alfred Tennyson’s Ulysses, ‘To follow knowledge like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought’. For it was her thirst for knowledge that led her to her passion for gynaecology, eventually leading to her career and now vocation.

She is currently the clinical director at Nova IVI Fertility Centre. We wish this dynamic, passionate doctor all the very best in her journey in creating happy parents!