

*Obituary*

**Omar Prakash, MD PhD 1936–1993**

*Founding Editor and Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Clinical Monitoring and Computing*

“The sum total of all that lives is God.  
We may not be God but we are of God even as a little drop  
of water is of the ocean.” – Gandhi

It is with great regret and feeling of loss that we announce the passing of Dr. Omar Prakash, our friend and mentor, on Sunday the 18th of April, 1993. Omar had just completed another around the world trip to visit with professional associates and friends. On his arrival at the Amsterdam Airport he had a second major heart attack and died without regaining consciousness. As many of you may know, Omar had a major myocardial infarction last November in Singapore. He was well taken care of there and within a few weeks was back in Rotterdam. Just a few short weeks after returning to Rotterdam he was back at his office performing his duties as anesthesiologist.

As North American Editor of the *International Journal of Clinical Monitoring and Computing*, I have been asked to write an obituary for Omar. This is a very difficult task for many reasons. Omar was such an energetic and organized person that in his 56 years of life he likely did more than most of us could do in a century of living. Omar was born on 7 July, 1936 in Gorakhpur, India. This city is near the foothills of the Himalayas and only 400 km from Mount Everest. Perhaps it was because of the closeness to the world's highest peak that Omar set out in life to become one of its outstanding medical leaders. To all of us he was a person who had a zest for life, was unbelievably energetic, was an organizer and teacher. He participated in and organized conferences throughout the world. In fact even after his medical problems in Singapore he was helping organize the World Congress on Critical Care in Madrid, Spain in June of 1993!! Most of us would have been willing to leave such tasks to our colleagues, but not Omar. Such an involvement with the desire to teach and be involved was a trademark of Omar Prakash.



Omar received his college education in Lucknow, India, a city about 150 km south and west of Gorakhpur. Omar received an MBBS (the equivalent of the MD degree in the British Commonwealth) there in 1960. He completed his medical training in General Medicine, General Surgery and Anesthesia in England from 1961 to 1966. From there he undertook and completed training in Anesthesia and Intensive Care in Denmark and Norway from 1967 to 1970. From 1970 until the time of his death he was associated with The Thorax Centrum and the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, where he was chief of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery Anesthesia. He was awarded the Medical Doctor diploma in The Netherlands in 1972. He achieved a Diploma in Anesthesia from the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1978. Omar received his



Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) from Erasmus University in Rotterdam 1980. His thesis title was "Monitoring of Heart and Lung Function in Cardiac Surgery."

Perhaps Omar was known best for his unique ability to organize conferences and congresses. He organized more than 100 of them throughout the world. While many of us may never have been outside our own country or perhaps to one or two other countries in Europe, it seems Omar had been everywhere on earth! There are 7 continents in the World: Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, North America, South America and Antarctica. Antarctica, which is a continent without cities, is the only one where Omar did not share his medical and organizational expertise! A list of the 83 cities where Omar participated in conferences as a presenter are impressive. They include in Asia: *Hong Kong; Singapore; Bombay, Chandigarh, Madras, India; Jakarta, Kuta, Indonesia; Manila, Philippines; and Tokyo, Kyoto, Japan.* Africa: *Jerusalem, Haifa, Israel; Amman, Jordan; Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and Tunis in Tunisia.* Australia and New Zealand: *Christchurch, New Zealand; and Perth, Australia.* Europe: *Gmunden, Graz, Vienna, Austria; Brussels, Gent, Leuven, Belgium; Odense, Denmark; Chartridge, London, England; Oulu, Tampere, Finland; Paris, France; Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Luedenscheid, Mainz, Munich, Germany; Balatonfured, Hungary; Maratea, Milan, Rome, Italy; Amsterdam, Leiden, Maastricht, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Zoetermeer, The Netherlands; Warsaw, Poland; Porto, Portugal; Moscow, Russia; Lund, Uppsala, Sweden; Madrid, Spain; St. Moritz, Switzerland.* North America: *Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; Tucson, AZ; Beverly Hills, Palm Desert, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Monica, CA; Norwalk, CT; Vail, CO; Washington, DC; Miami, FL; Chicago, IL; Las Vegas, NV; Bethesda, MD; Detroit, MI; Minneapolis, Rochester, MN; Pittsburgh, PA; Salt Lake City, UT; Madison, WI; of the United States of America.* South America: *Maracaibo, Venezuela; Mexico City, Mexico, Montevideo, Uruguay, Oranjestad, Aruba, Quito, Ecuador, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*

In addition to Omar's ability for organizing conferences, he was a prolific writer. He was an active scientist with more than 100 publications. Of the 90 publications I reviewed from his Curriculum Vitae there were 8 in the field of Anesthesia, 27 in Respiratory Medicine, 11 in Hemodynamics and

Cardiovascular Monitoring, 35 in the field of Medical Informatics and Medical Computing and 10 in the broad field of Monitoring and Physiology. The breadth of topics covered and academic status of his colleagues listed as co-authors on the publications were impressive. To mention just two, of whom I was familiar – Dr. Paul Hugenholtz, an internationally known cardiologist from the Thorax Centrum in Rotterdam and Dr. Bjorn Jonson, a well known physiologist from Lund, Sweden.

I recently had the personal opportunity to visit with Omar in Rotterdam – the second week of March 1993. I was at a conference in Gent, Belgium. On Friday March 12th I took an early train to Rotterdam. I met Omar at about 11 a.m. He was dressed in his surgical greens with his surgical hat on. He was very relaxed and congenial. When I arrived he was visiting with a representative from Abbott Critical Care. They had been talking about "long" central arterial catheters – a concept and technique that we shared at our two hospitals, but were unaware of each others work. He was excited to let me know, that in the past few years, that he and his colleagues had published on the subject. "Measurement of Arterial Pressure After Cardiopulmonary Bypass With Long Radial Artery Catheters" in the *Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Anesthesia* in February of 1990.

To give a flavor for how I felt about my visit with Omar, I will share the first paragraph of the letter I wrote that day on the train back to Gent. "It was a delight to visit with you today. I was excited to see how well you look and feel!! As always you were energetic and enthusiastic. You are indeed an unusual and almost "superhuman" person. I hope you continue to take care of yourself and continue to feel well. You are indeed lucky to be alive. My thoughts and dreams and prayers have been with you since I heard of your difficulties last fall. We need your enthusiasm and energy too much longer. Please take care of yourself!!"

Omar was unusually relaxed and happy. We sat around the table in his office and discussed a wide variety of topics from computer in medicine, to his recent visits to New York City to have his heart checked out. He was especially pleased that his colleagues in New York were so kind to him and that their examination and observations were reassuring. I was surprised at how spry and creative he was. After a very warm and broad discussion we had a wonderful lunch at a nearby restaurant. The conversation was again light and bright. We shared fond



remembrances of the times we had interacted at a large number of meetings. We talked about common friends, the people who were "crazy" fun and those who we thought were just too serious. After our lunch we sat down and had some very thoughtful editorial discussions about the *International Journal of Clinical Monitoring and Computing*. We got through the discussion and then had a most stimulating discussion about the future of the International Journal. We talked about having people write review articles on a wide variety of topics. We also talked about expanding the number of issues of the Journal. We agreed *not* to hold a conference in Rotterdam in June, but to wait until June of 1994 to allow Omar to recover from his myocardial infarction.

He then explained to me that he wanted to be involved in taking the knowledge of monitoring technology and medical computing to the hinterlands of what was Russia and the lands of the Far East. Immediately, he had my attention since I have had a dream for 20 years to take the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Moscow to Vladivostock! We discussed how a group of us might put such an expedition together. I surely would need him to organize and develop the contacts we would need in these far away lands. He expressed very strongly that he had a strong personal need to spread the technology he and his colleagues had developed to these deprived areas of the world. We talked specifically about visiting Mongolia, China, India, and Korea. Occasionally I thought of Omar as one of the characters from a 1930s musical production who might say "Let's sweep out the barn and get some lights and put on a musical". Well with Omar it was "Let's rent a conference hall, get some speakers from around the world and put on a computers in medicine conference". It didn't seem to matter to him what city or even what country it was in. If Omar said that there would be a high-quality scientific meeting there, there was!

After a pleasant and stimulating discussion of these issues we then went to the laboratory to see what Omar and his team were up to in the area of medical computing. The work he and his people were doing was truly state of the art! They were using PCs and other interfaces to replace many of the functions of bedside monitors. Beautifully laid out computer screens had compact and excellent graphics, displaying "trends" of several physiological parameters. He had a couple of co-workers describe their work. He was obviously proud of what they had done and let

them take the credit for their innovative work. As part of the discussion Omar asked if I had a student who might come and work with him for 3 to 6 months. I was very excited about the opportunity since I could clearly see that Omar was on the verge of making another major contribution to the field of computerized monitoring. As always Omar was on the leading edge of a new monitoring technology.

Rounding out the characteristics of this unusual man who was a brilliant scientist and person and took the time to publish state of the art works in a broad variety of fields. He was "the" most energetic organizer I have ever met! He had the ability to put together a wide variety of physicians, nurses, therapists, engineers, and medical informaticians into a working cooperative. Each of the participants of conferences and working groups shared their knowledge in a format that showed no "holier than thou" discrimination to any group. His ability to personally know a truly international group of participants was remarkably unusual. Occasionally he had a rather "brusk" outer appearance and demeanor, but inside he was one of the kindest people I have ever had the opportunity to know and work with. Perhaps because I am a computer scientist and specialist in Medical Informatics he was very patient and kind to me; for what reason, I will never know, but for which I am thankful. For his loving kindness to me and to many others who had the association with this great man I am touched and have grown because of knowing him. To Anne Marie and their three beautiful daughters we send our love and sympathy. His three daughters absolutely adored him, he was everything to them. Omar was the happiest when his wife Anne Marie and his daughters were at his side. He will be missed not only as a husband and father, but as a scientist, physician, colleague, organizer, coach, and editor who contributed mightily to the field of monitoring and medical informatics.

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