

Obituary: Professor Devendra K. Chhabra

Gilbert Dechambenoit

Professor Devendra K. Chhabra recently died. I did not know him and had never met him, but I do not think that we necessarily have to know a colleague to appreciate their professional contribution and moral rectitude.

Professor Chhabra and Dr. G.D. Agarwal rendered invaluable service to tens of thousands of patients thanks to a valve-shunt they designed and marketed at an affordable cost for all, in particular less fortunate patients in low- and middle-income countries.¹⁻³

The “Chhabra shunt,” which was marketed at \$35, is as efficient as the (standard) \$650 valve.^{1,3} Neurosurgeons operating in low- and middle-income countries, where average monthly incomes are estimated at \$50 per month for an average family of 5 to 10, have experienced the distress and heartbreak faced by those families when they are to afford treatment for their hydrocephalic child, due to a lack of financial resources.⁴ A real tragedy not just for those families but also for us, the caregivers who witness the slow and unspeakable agony of children often outcast as monsters ending up being excluded from their communities.⁵⁻⁷

With courage, tenacity, abnegation, and brilliance, our colleagues overcame the technique of making shunts and the widespread

opposition and questionable motives from research and development labs in rich countries.

Professor Chhabra renounced material gain from the sale of the valve that bears his name. This highly principled stance that fully aligns with our medical ethics should guide us all in how we provide access to care for all in optimal conditions of care, without any discrimination. He wrote “I consider myself extremely lucky and blessed. It is not often that one enjoys the fruits of one’s plowing in one’s own lifetime.”¹

With respect and thanks, we bow to his memory. Without doubt his soul will rest in peace forever.

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