

IN THE HOT SEAT – Dr Kiran Marthak

On the top gear

<http://www.expresspharmaonline.com/20060131/pharmalife03.shtml>

*No white coat, no stethoscope over his shoulder and no big round glasses. Dressed in a sleek shirt, grey pants and a tie, **Dr Kiran Marthak** looks like a businessman on the prowl and not a doctor. If not for his business sense, he would have been just another general practitioner doling out prescriptions and not the one who decides what doctors prescribe. **Katya Naidu** profiles the Medical Director of Veeda Clinical Research.*



Being an exceptionally bright student in childhood was not just another feather in Dr Kiran Marthak's cap. It was the first step of his individuality. His good grades earned him many scholarships and with a proud smile, he claims that his parents never had to pay his school fees as his scholarships took care of that. This was not all. While he was in SSC, he even tutored and earned his way through. "My first student was a 50-year-old man who wanted to learn English and I earned Rs 35 a month by teaching him. He was so happy with me that I ended up tutoring his children too," he reminisces.

Earning money at a young age and funding his education by himself taught him many lessons on the value of money. Despite being economically independent, he made it a point never to splurge. His school was forty minutes away from home but he always walked to save money. "It helps you a lot if you earn the money the hard way," he says.

Going places

Continuing his fine streak in academics, he made it through MD in the first attempt. This earned him an offer for the post of Assistant Manager, Medical Affairs, from Ciba-Geigy, the company which later merged with Sandoz to form Novartis. This was the beginning of his career in the pharma industry. Who knew that a few years down the line, he would move over to clinical research?

His stint at Ciba-Geigy gave him not just an insight into clinical trials; it also inspired him to do a diploma course in business management. While he was the Chairman of new product launches at the company, he often heard marketing people using terms like variable product cost, marginal contribution, product growth and so on, which were beyond his comprehension. He realised that if he did not understand all the aspects of the industry, there was no point in becoming a chairman. "You have to combine science with business because only science is not enough," he asserts, emphasising the importance of entrepreneurial skills in researchers. Studying

business management not only made him worthy of the position he held but also helped him in all his future endeavours.

Equipped with a strong background of science and business knowledge, Marthak was instrumental in the establishment of Pfizer's medical department when he joined as the VP of Clinical Research. The move to Pfizer helped him grow as a clinician too as he was involved in the clinical research of compounds not for the Indian regulatory body but for USFDA, which became a source of pride. "Our department was doing the trials in India but it was contracted to CROs in other countries. We were doing the trials at one-third the cost of what CROs were charging Pfizer otherwise. The amount of money that we saved was probably more than the profits that Pfizer India was making," he beams.

Fun facts about Dr Marthak

- Cars are his second love. He loves to zip along lonely highways at high speeds
- Luxembourg is his favourite holiday jaunt
- An ardent bird watcher but does not own any birds as he does not believe in cages
- Is married to an ENT surgeon whom he met in college
- Favourite cricketer is Nari Contractor
- Loves South Indian food apart from traditional Gujarati food
- Is a big fan of Robert Ludlum

Driving change

Even though his loyalties remain with clinical research, his abilities made him achieve a lot outside the sphere. He was the mastermind behind a computer-aided revolution of optical data management of cash record forms (CRF) in Pfizer. In the days when computers were still a status symbol for the rich and an object of wonder for the masses, he imported a server to India, paying an import duty of a whopping Rs 1 crore. In addition, he had to lay down a 156 kbps telephone line between Bombay and the UK to transmit CRFs. Cash record forms were scanned in the USA, transmitted optically and stored in the server. These were then processed in India and shipped back to USA via the same line. To achieve world-class expertise in the area, they had to train their workforce in USA. All the effort eventually paid off, as their work was not just time-consuming and cost saving but also of high quality. "We could show that the quality of work generated was higher as we could achieve less error rate," he says.

However, every success is a team effort. Marthak believes that ten minds think better than one and there is nothing impossible when they join hands. Being from a big family of nine brothers and sisters, he understood the nitty-gritty of group dynamics since childhood. When they were young, they were given the task of cleaning the house on holidays, which they did by effectively dividing work among each other. Similarly, he feels that effective distribution of work and appropriate motivation can work wonders. He has a warm relationship with his team. "I have a friendly relationship with all my team members and try to help them out in case of personal issues and ill health," he says.

Where is the doctor?

A business management degree and a Director on the board of a CRO! Does that make him any less a doctor? It doesn't. He is still very much a doctor who treats his patients. "The reason why I stuck around in all those companies is because they allowed me to practise medicine after hours. I still have a clinic in Andheri and see some patients whenever I find time," he informs.

"Treating patients gives me a lot of job satisfaction. In the office, all I do is protocol writing and attending meetings. But when I see a patient recovering, it gives me a lot of peace of mind. Money is just secondary." The doctor is not lost; he is very much there despite all the responsibilities that his ventures have brought.

editorial@expresspharmaonline.com