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## OPINION

## Professor Kailash Chand OBE MBBS FRCGP

### Obituary

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#### ABSTRACT

A Sportsman, Poet & Philosopher

Kailash Chand Malhotra was born in Shimla, India on 10 June 1948, the same year of the birth of the NHS to Harish Chander and HemLata. Kailash was the eldest of four brothers and one sister. His early schooling was in a village called Adhoya, in the Kurukshetra district of the state of Haryana. Kailash was not only exceptionally good at cricket, he started the first cricket team in his school in 1963 and played as the first captain. He chose to read medicine spurred on by his desire to serve the disadvantaged people. Kailash gained admission at the Government Medical College, Patiala, Punjab in 1968, based on his prowess and potential in cricket, something that he retained throughout his illustrious medical career.

In addition to medicine, he had an interest in politics due to the influence of his uncle. He was soon involved in two agitations when the Government of India imposed restrictions on farmers from owning land. During the farmers' uprisings in 1970 and 1972, Kailash along with other medical students stood up for the farmers' rights. He was taken into custody on both occasions, and released on bail. His academic career was unhampered; he qualified as a doctor in 1972, completing his preregistration year at the Northern Railway hospital, Delhi.

As a junior doctor at the Safdarjung hospital in Delhi, he met Anisha, who was also a junior doctor and tied the knot in Delhi in 1974. Kailash had two sons Amit and Aseem before he

decided to venture to England in 1978. The family arrived in Liverpool where he worked at Alder Hey hospital as a junior doctor in paediatrics. His dream of becoming a consultant paediatrician was shattered when he was informed by a senior consultant that there was no likelihood of him achieving success due to being a 'foreigner'. His career took him to Manchester, where he developed an interest in primary care, which he recounted later was unattractive to local graduates, and so heavily dependent on immigrant doctors like him. Kailash's intellect and versatility made him shine as a general practitioner (GP) in his new home town Stalybridge, Greater Manchester.

After working with a local GP for several years he set up his own practice at Stamford House, which was inaugurated by Rt Hon Andy Burnham, then the MP from Wigan and Leigh. This relationship grew stronger over the years, a bond that remained to his last day. His practice was situated in a very deprived part of Greater Manchester. Undoubtedly as he saw the health risks of being poor and disadvantaged, his opinion about the broader scope of medicine in reducing the social determinants of ill health became more crystallised. He became a brand ambassador for doctors in vocalising the challenges of teenage pregnancies, obesity, depression, diabetes, and so on.

Following his retirement, Kailash was appointed Chair of Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust, which was then



facing significant financial challenges as well as a struggling local hospital. Together with the CEO, Tim Riley, Kailash turned around the fortunes of the PCT. When he departed his Chairmanship in 2013 (due to the dissolution of the PCT by Lansley's Health Act) the PCT was in sound financial health with a £23 million surplus. He was then appointed Chair of Tameside Healthwatch, a post he held until his death, making him the longest serving chair for any Healthwatch in England.

However, life never stood still for Kailash. He was probably the most prolific medical writer of our generation, contributing regularly to the Guardian, Pulse, The Independent, The Mirror, Tribune, and many other regional and national papers. He wrote blogs for Pulse, Tribune and the BMJ. There were numerous compelling appearances on BBC TV, Sky, RTV, and ITV as well as several radio interviews.

He was forthright in his criticism of the running of the NHS, and widely acknowledged as the fiercest defender of the NHS. He highlighted the crisis in General Practice, discrimination, pitfalls of privatisation, funding issues and staff morale. He was quick to identify fundamental weaknesses in the Sustainability Transformation Plan model, and lately vociferous in his opposition to the Health Bill which is currently going through parliament. He was often canvassed for his opinions, and quoted by prominent opposition politicians, including in the House of Commons. He had an uncanny ability to argue with facts and figures stored deep in his cerebrum.

He had an affiliation to many organisations, perhaps the longest was to the BMA where he was a member for almost 3 decades. He was the first minority ethnic doctor to be elected as the deputy chairman and to be awarded the honorary Vice-Presidency of the BMA. He was a long standing member of British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin and British International Doctors Association. He was the health advisor to Andy Burnham, when he was elected Mayor of Greater Manchester; trustee of Aardvark Housing Association; and a member of the Manchester India Partnership.

Kailash touched the hearts and imagination of hundreds of people with his wit, his charm and his genuine interest in their wellbeing. There was a huge outpouring of emotions, sense of loss and affection by not just those close to him, but people who were perfect strangers. For the last few years he had been turning his life to philosophy and so his '*Lessons for life*' were widely read and often lifted the moods of many of his followers.

He was most certainly one of the 'greats' of our profession. He won many accolades, chief among them an OBE in 2011 for services to the NHS and healthcare, the Labour Party National Award by Ed Miliband, for lifetime services to the NHS (2012), the 11th most influential GP by Pulse (2014), in top 50 Health Services Journal BME pioneers (2014), and a Fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners (2019). Kailash was recently featured in a BBC documentary *Our NHS – A Hidden History*.

He was dedicated to his wife and his sons Amit & Aseem. One of his real moments of pride was when his son Aseem Malhotra, a consultant cardiologist and launched his film 'The Big Fat Fix' which became a trend setter in healthy diets.

Kailash was an all-rounder. From his early formative years

in medical school he developed a fondness for ghazals and Urdu Shayari (poetry). That remained so till his last days and indeed he would delight many with his short videos frequently dispatched through social media of shayari that he had written or a recital of his favourite poems. He revelled in conveying his disapproval of politicians who meddled with the NHS by reciting this poetry:

*Barbad gulistan karne ko  
bas ek hi ullu kaafi tha,  
Har shakh pe ullu baitha hai  
anjam-e-gulistan kya hoga*

(To ruin a garden, only one owl is sufficient,  
If there resides an owl on every branch,  
who knows what fate may befall the garden)

His favourite poets were Ghalib, Gulzar, Shiv Kumar Batalvi and Sahir Ludhianvi. Along with his passion for cricket, his fondness for the Indian Cricket team, he loved the cinema. His favourite Bollywood classics were *Pyaasa*, *Mughal-E-Azam*, and *Guide*; his favourite singers were Talat Mahomood, Jagjit Singh and Begum Akhtar. Kailash found relaxation on long walks, often with one friend or another, along the river Mersey in Didsbury near his new home.

My memory of Kailash is his passion for rightfulness and campaigns, for supporting the underdog and underprivileged, and for extolling the virtues of a health care system which he saw to be the best in the world, with much justification. He had intellect as well as compassion. In conversation he made everyone feel special, without any concern about time or any other conflicting commitments. If he needed to move mountains to come to the aid of someone in need, he would do it without any expectations.

He had an enormous respect within the political circles, the media and the NHS. He was a seasoned debater, able to engage with and challenge complex proposals, present his arguments with clarity, and able to exercise judgements with real integrity. He never shirked from controversy – his *modus operandi* was always to articulate his view point in a way that attracted the most attention. Indeed, not infrequently he would send his articles to those whom he might have criticised. He was equally adept at stating his case in 160 characters on Twitter where he had a significant following, as he could with 2,000 word treatise.

We will miss him for all those special things he brought to us - his affection, his passion, his convictions and his loyalty. His sudden and unexpected death at the age of 73 has produced ripples around the UK and in his home country, India. Kailash lost his older son Amit in 1988 and his wife in 2020. He leaves a legacy through his variety of work and vast amounts of literature which will long preserve his memory. He had a masterly touch in getting the headlines into news. His oft repeated demand to me was,

*'JS give me a punchline!'*

## REFERENCES

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jul/27/respected-gp-and-fearless-defender-of-nhs-dies-at-73-kailash-chand>

