

WORKSHOPS SUPPORTED BY IUPS

India, 1978

In 1978, Professor Otto Hutter (University of Glasgow) supported the development of an IUPS workshop in New Delhi to be held at the All-India Institute for Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He invited Ainslie Iggo (originally from New Zealand, then working in Edinburgh) and Ann Sefton (from Sydney, Australia) to develop and lead an educational workshop. The final plans were put together in New Delhi prior to the workshop. Distinguished local organisers included Professor Manchanda and Dr Usha Nayar, as well as an educational expert, Professor V Natarajan. The workshop was supported by senior physiologists, largely from India, including Professor A. Paintal. Unfortunately, the original full report of the workshop cannot be located.

Participants came from all over India and a smaller number from neighbouring countries. At the workshop, there were many opportunities for discussion that was often lively, as well as 'hands on' practical experience. Widely divergent views on teaching emerged. Some of the teachers at the workshop stressed the need for didactic approaches and memorisation, while others saw the greater importance of developing understanding, encouraging independent critical thinking and practical skills.

The All-India Institute was well equipped: individuals and groups at the workshop had many opportunities to explore a range of novel experimental and educational approaches in order to develop new skills in teaching and learning. A number of participants came from less well-resourced institutions and they provided information about the obvious limitations in terms of access for staff training and a lack of resources, particularly for experimental work and research. I was invited to visit a regional medical school and its associated hospital. There, teaching was very traditional in a lecture-based format and with very limited basic practical work. It became apparent that the only electronic equipment was an elderly oscilloscope (surplus from World War 2), locked in the office of the Head of Department of Physiology. It was not used effectively either for research or teaching.

One of a number of issues discussed at the time included the development of educational objectives to define relevant goals or directions (now more frequently designed to be measurable outcomes). The aim was to encourage a better understanding of physiology appropriate for the environments from which the teachers and students came. I think many of us also learned an interesting lesson from one distinguished clinical participant who joined in discussions and reviewed some of the draft reports. He argued that it was essential to ensure that both medical educational objectives and the curriculum content be focused on high priority local and national needs, rather than be designed to meet the international expectations of those in the developed world.

During discussion, several delegates confirmed that in some schools, a culture of rewarding memorisation and recall was much in evidence. The notion of "active learning" for understanding, rather than rote memorisation and recall, represented a new concept to some participants. Consequently, debate at the small group sessions was at times very lively.

The local hospitality was outstanding. Opportunities were also made for me to learn something of the rich history and culture of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur by visiting some of the major sites. Experiences varied from cultural, religious (including a wedding), astronomical and major historical sites to the zoo (with its white tigers). Participants also explored the varieties of Indian cuisine. Overall, it was a privilege to have been part of such a rich scientific, educational and cultural experience; friendships have continued to the present.

Some original black and white photographs survive (of variable quality), and are appended here to provide a sense of the range of activities and participants.



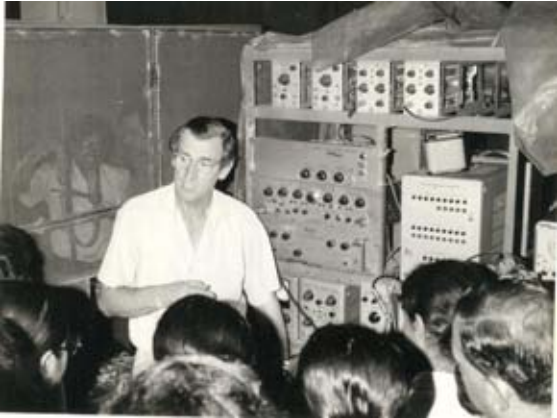
Workshop participants



Local workshop organisers with Ann Sefton



A discussion group in action



Ainslie Iggo: neurophysiology



A respiratory demonstration



Usha Nayar: electrophysiology



Blood pressure studies



Teaching visual science: a model of the eye developed in Sydney