

Dr. Aravind Kumar leads BIMDA as new president; big year ahead for group

By Ken Datzman

Last year, the Brevard-Indo American Medical and Dental Association, known as BIMDA, celebrated its 20th anniversary. And it was a milestone year, with 11 of its members receiving the Congressional Medal of Recognition from U.S. Rep. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge.

These medals are presented at the community level. Posey recognized the organization for its “commitment to education and devotion to charitable giving,” calling BIMDA “a pillar of Central Florida.” The presentation took place at BIMDA’s annual gala in late November.

“I think BIMDA has achieved milestone after milestone, and Rep. Posey recognized our important work in the community,” said Dr. Ashok Shah, an internist in Titusville who received one of the medals and is a member of Parrish Medical Center’s board of directors.

“Over the last two decades, BIMDA has really blossomed. It’s a great organization,” added Dr. Shah, BIMDA’s longtime event sponsorship chairman.

The individual recognition was based on 10 consecutive years of leadership service to BIMDA.

In addition to Dr. Shah, the medal recipients included Dr. Mahesh Soni, a pediatrician with offices in Palm Bay and Satellite Beach, who co-founded BIMDA; Dr. Subhash Rege, a Palm Bay dentist; Dr. Mukesh Aggarwal, a leader in the local Indian community who has practiced ophthalmology since the 1970s and pioneered the outpatient surgery-center concept in Brevard; and Dr. Homi Cooper, the senior-most physician in BIMDA and an occupational medicine specialist.

The list continues with Dr. Sue Mitra, an internal medicine practitioner in Melbourne; Dr. Abdul Karim, a cardiologist with a practice in Rockledge; Dr. N. Rao Kopuri, the group’s first dentist president; Dr. Gobi Balaji, an internist with a practice in Melbourne who serves on the Health First Foundation board; Dr. Ravi Palaniyandi, a supporter of



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Brevard Indo-American Medical and Dental Association will host its annual Regional Medical Expo and CME Conference on Saturday, April 23, at the Hilton Melbourne Rialto Place. Hundreds of people from the medical and health-care community are expected to attend the event. Sponsorships are available across a wide range of prices. BIMDA, an educational and charitable organization, is starting its 21st year. From left, the BIMDA team includes: Dr. Rajasri Krishnamurthy, Spouse Auxiliary Committee chairwoman; Dr. Aravind Kumar, president; Glad Kurian, co-founder and honorary executive director; Dr. Ashok Shah, sponsorship chairman; and Geeta Shah, co-chairwoman, Spouse Auxiliary Committee.

numerous philanthropic and charitable organizations and a cardiologist with Space Coast Cardiology; and Glad Kurian, BIMDA co-founder and its honorary executive director.

“BIMDA is going through a really good phase right now,” said Kurian, a vice president with Morgan Stanley in Melbourne. “We’re happy with all of our progress. Every year there are 20 to 30 new Indian physicians coming here to practice medicine, and BIMDA is a platform for them to communicate with their colleagues and be part of the community.”

He added, “I think under Dr. Aravind Kumar, our new president who took over on Jan. 1, BIMDA will achieve another strong year. We are excited to welcome Dr. Kumar and his wife (Dr. Rajasri Krishnamurthy). They bring a lot of

goodwill to the medical community. We expect to see a good amount of interest in BIMDA from doctors this year.”

What began as a small social

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Brevard-Indo American Medical and Dental Association

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gathering among medical colleagues, BIMDA has grown to become one of the most influential organizations of its kind in the state and is Florida's leading Indian medical association. BIMDA physician and dentist members are dedicated to strengthening the community through their involvement.

"BIMDA is an organization where all like-minded members come together to promote quality medical education in Brevard County, and we also do a lot of philanthropic work," said Dr. Kumar, a practicing internist at Brevard Internal Medicine in Melbourne.

"At our two annual events — in April and November — we bring in medical specialists who showcase recent advances in medicine, conduct lectures, and provide the latest updates in the various fields of practice, so that the citizens of Brevard are well served in the medical arena. Doctors earn continuing medical education units at these events, both of which have been very successful over the years."

Dr. Kumar has been involved with BIMDA since relocating here from New York some eight years ago. Dr. Rajasri Krishnamurthy is the "Spouse Auxiliary" chairwoman for BIMDA, with co-chair Geeta Shah. Member spouses have played an important role in BIMDA's long-running success in the community.

"The spouses are very active with BIMDA and we always look forward to the BIMDA events, where we have the opportunity to socialize with our colleagues and with people in the health-care community, including the presidents of the area hospitals," said Dr. Krishna-murthy, an internist with Health First Medical Group in Palm Bay.

The president-elect of BIMDA is Dr. Aparna Kopuri, who has been a Brevard County resident for the last 30 years. She was the first child psychiatrist to practice in Brevard and was the first medical director of the former CPC Palm Bay Hospital, a 60-bed psychiatric hospital for children.

Dr. Kopuri is now with Circles of Care, where she does inpatient work. "I have been active with BIMDA for the past 10 years," she said. "I have seen the organization grow and really gain stature in the community. I'm excited about its future."

Her husband, Dr. N. Rao Kopuri, was the first dentist to be president of BIMDA and is the organization's finance director. He practices at Central Florida Orthodontic Specialists, with locations in Melbourne and Rockledge as well as in greater Orlando. Their daughter, Dr. Avanthi Kopuri, an orthodontist, is affiliated with the practice, too.

Dr. Ravi Shankar, president of Cancer Care Centers of Brevard, says "one of the most important things BIMDA does as an organization is increase the level of medical education available to not only specialists, but also primary-care physicians in the community, who are busy in their respective practices. BIMDA plays a role keeping area physicians on the cutting edge of medicine."

He said "reading books is one thing, but bringing in top-level speakers who have practiced medicine and who impart their knowledge to us is really key. Physicians, in turn, bring that knowledge to their patients and the

community in general. We at BIMDA always aim and strive to be the best we can be." A board-certified radiation oncologist, Dr. Shankar is the co-chairman with Dr. Soni for BIMDA's Continuing Medical Education program.

In his particular field, Dr. Shankar says cancer care is evolving and he was pleased to hear President Obama's announcement during his final "State of the Union" address that his administration is launching the "Precision Medicine Initiative," a bold new research effort to revolutionize how we improve health and treat disease.

The president's program is being billed as the "moonshot to cure cancer" by 2020. It's an effort to break down cancer-research silos, increase resources, and get effective treatments into the hands of more Americans.

"Recently, cancer has taken over as the No. 1 killer in many states," said Dr. Shankar. "I think this initiative is an important step because it centers on the prevention of cancer."

Cancer is now the leading cause of death in 21 states, including Florida, according to the findings in "Cancer Statistics 2016," the American Cancer Society's annual report on cancer incidence, mortality, and survival.

The report also says steady reductions in smoking combined with advances in cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment have resulted in a 23 percent drop in the cancer death rate since its peak in 1991.

Every year, the ACS estimates new cancer cases and deaths in the U.S. for the current year and compiles the most recent data on cancer incidence, mortality, and survival. The report estimates there will be 1.6 million new cancer cases and 595,690 cancer deaths in America in 2016.

Launched with a \$215 million investment as part of President Obama's 2016 Budget — with \$130 million allocated to the National Institutes of Health to build a national, large-scale research participant group, or cohort — the Precision Medicine Initiative will pioneer a new model of "patient-powered" research that promises to accelerate biomedical discoveries and provide clinicians with new tools, knowledge, and therapies to select which treatments will work best for which patients.

Most medical treatments have been designed for the "average patient." As a result of this "one-size-fits-all" approach, treatments can be very successful for some patients but not for others.

This is changing with the emergence of precision medicine, an innovative approach to disease prevention and treatment that takes into account individual differences in people's genes, environments, and lifestyles, said Dr. Shankar, whose organization's Cancer Care Centers Foundation of Brevard has helped many uninsured and underinsured cancer patients over the years with their medication expenses, utilities and rent, and in other ways.

BIMDA is especially known for its charitable endeavors in the community, from supporting the Space Coast Center for Mothers with Children, now known as Gabrielle Place, to partnering with the Salvation Army of Melbourne in its mission of providing education and

community health. Over the last two decades, BIMDA has reached out to many different nonprofit organizations.

"During the first quarter of the year we will be participating in a big event, the sixth annual Eckerd Kids' Brevard Walk of Fame' gala. BIMDA along with Parrish Medical Center are the presenting sponsors of the event. And Health First is also a significant supporter of Walk of Fame. It's the corporate sponsor. We try to support as many local nonprofit entities as we can. It's going to be a great program. The Eckerd Foundation will be honoring five outstanding individuals from the community that evening," said Kurian.

Brevard Walk of Fame is from 6 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, March 12, at the Radisson Resort Convention Center in Cape Canaveral. The honorees are: Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, former Apollo 11 astronaut and founder of Share Space Foundation; William "Bill" Brown, president, chief executive officer and chairman of Harris Corp.; Howard "Howie D" Dorrough, member of the Backstreet Boys and founding member of Dorrough Lupus Foundation; John Craig, Brevard County School Board, District 2; and Lynda Weatherman, president and chief executive officer of the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast.

The event will benefit hundreds of disadvantaged youth in Brevard County through programs that focus on anti-violence, as well as prevent substance abuse, child abuse, and neglect.

Meanwhile, BIMDA leaders are gearing up for their "Regional Medical Expo and CME Conference" set for Saturday, April 23, at the Hilton Melbourne Rialto Place. The full-day program includes a dinner. BIMDA is recruiting sponsors for the event.

"For the last couple of years we have been attracting a good number of doctors to BIMDA, and I think that is a testament to the Continuing Medical Education Committee," said Dr. Shah, BIMDA's sponsorship chairman.

He said about 80 percent of BIMDA's event sponsors are repeat customers. "I think that speaks to the value the sponsors see in our events. When businesses and entities are spending money on sponsorships, if they don't see value in their investment it's not going to happen a second time. We're proud of our sponsorship retention over the years."

BIMDA offers a wide range of sponsorships for its Regional Medical Expo and CME Conference. Interested parties may call 952-0853 or visit www.BIMDA.com. Dr. Shah's e-mail is acgm1955@aol.com. Another contract is Dr. N. Rao Kopuri. His e-mail is Braceko@aol.com.

Not only have sponsors stayed aboard BIMDA, its membership base has basically remained intact over the last 20 years. Dr. Karim, the cardiologist, is an example.

"I'm one of the senior members of the organization and a past president. Right now, I'm on the executive committee helping BIMDA organize its annual functions. I have greatly enjoyed the camaraderie with my fellow colleagues. BIMDA continues to evolve under each president and the future looks awfully bright for our organization," Dr. Karim.