

Dr Pashupati Nath Laha (1913-1993): A Pioneer in Indian Medicine and Infectious Disease Research

Raju Vaishya^{1*} , Abhishek Vaish¹ , Narendra Nath Laha²

Dr Pashupathi Nath Laha (1913-1993) was a prominent figure in Indian Medicine, renowned for his pioneering work in infectious disease research and medical education. Born in Munger, Bihar, he pursued his medical education at the Prince of Wales Medical College, Patna (India), where he earned his MBBS in 1938 and MD in 1941. Further enriching his expertise, Dr Laha trained in the UK, obtaining several prestigious qualifications, including Fellowships from the Royal College of Physicians. His professional career spanned several institutions, notably Gajra Raja Medical College in Gwalior, where he served as a Professor of Medicine and later as an Emeritus Professor. Dr Laha contributed significantly to medical education by mentoring over a hundred postgraduate doctors and was a prolific researcher with 80 publications in various respected journals, focusing primarily on infectious diseases. He was recognized for his contributions through honours such as the Netaji Oration Lecture and held key roles in professional organizations. Dr Laha's legacy endures through his impact on medical education and research, reflecting his commitment to improving healthcare in India, particularly in addressing public health challenges.

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Introduction

Early Life and Family Background

Dr (Professor) Pashupati Nath Laha, commonly known as Dr PN Laha (Figure 1), was a distinguished figure in India's medical field. His journey began with promising academic achievements, earning a gold medal in English during his Matriculation in Munger. This early success laid the foundation for a remarkable career in Medicine. Born on November 26, 1913, in Munger, Bihar, he was the son of Rajendra Nath and Malina Bala. Dr Laha married Mrs. Deepti Laha, and together, they had two children: Dr Narendra Nath Laha and Ms. Reba Aikat. His life journey concluded on March 21, 1993, in Gwalior, India, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire.

Academic Pursuits and Higher Education

Dr Laha's academic journey was marked by his dedication to learning and rapid academic progression. He began at the Prince of Wales Medical College in Patna (now known as Patna Medical College or PMCH), one of the

oldest medical institutions in India.¹ His commitment to his studies was evident as he completed his MBBS in 1938 and furthered his studies, achieving an MD in Medicine from the same institution in 1941. Dr Laha then broadened his medical expertise by traveling to the United Kingdom in 1952, where he obtained several prestigious qualifications, including the Diploma in Child Health (DCH), Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (MRCP) from both London and Edinburgh and ultimately Fellowships from both colleges (FRCP). Remarkably, he earned these qualifications in just ten months before returning to India to contribute to his homeland's medical landscape.

Professional Career

Dr Laha's professional career was primarily associated with Sarojini Naidu Medical College in Agra,² where he held various academic roles, starting as a lecturer in Paediatrics and then moved to Medicine from 1942 to 1950. He then rose to the position of Reader in Medicine until 1954. Dr Laha's most notable tenure was at Gajra Raja Medical College (GRMC) in Gwalior,³ where he served as a Professor of Medicine from 1954 until his retirement

¹Department of Orthopaedics, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, New Delhi 110076, India.

²Consultant Physician, Lalitpur colony, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Correspondence to: Raju Vaishya, Department of Orthopaedics, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, New Delhi 110076, India. E-mail: raju.vaishya@gmail.com

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Figure 1: Dr Pashupati Nath Laha (1913-1993)

in 1968. Subsequently, he became an Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the same institution and continued his impactful work until 1980. Additionally, he served as the President of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in Gwalior, further cementing his influence in the field.

Contributions to Medicine and Education

Dr Laha's contributions to medical education and healthcare services were significant and enduring. During his tenure, he worked tirelessly to improve the quality of medical education and infrastructure at the college. His leadership was instrumental in fostering a culture of academic excellence and research. Dr P.N. Laha was an administrator, dedicated educator, and mentor. He emphasized the importance of holistic medical education, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills. His efforts helped shape the careers of countless medical students who benefited from his wisdom and guidance. Throughout his career, Dr Laha was a postgraduate guide and examiner for over a hundred doctors who have since held significant positions within prestigious institutions in India and abroad.

Professional Achievements and Legacy

Dr Laha was honoured with the Netaji Oration Lecture by the Association of Physicians of India (API) and organized the API National Conference in Gwalior in 1966⁴ (Figure 2). Established in 1944, the API is India's most prominent and prestigious professional organization for postgraduate consultant physicians,

with over 22,000 members (<https://apiindia.org/>). He served as Vice President of the Third International Conference on Medical Education held in New Delhi and became a member of the Jiwaji University Karya Parishad in Gwalior.

Research and Publications

Dr Laha was a prolific researcher, even in those times when research facilities were very scarce. His 80 publications in the PubMed database⁵ present a diverse and comprehensive overview of his contributions to medical research, touching upon various aspects of internal Medicine, infectious diseases, and specific pathophysiological conditions. These publications, done between 1942 and 1977 (Figure 3), even after his retirement, were a testament to his dedication to advancing medical knowledge. They were published in various well-known Indian medical journals of that time, including the *Indian Journal of Pediatrics (IJP)*, *Indian Medical Gazette (IMG)*, *Journal of Indian Medical Association (JIMA)*, *Journal of Association of Physicians of India (JAPI)*, *Indian Journal of Malariology (IJM)*, and *Indian Journal of Chest Diseases (IJCD)*. In addition, he published two articles in the prestigious *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* on diphtheritic encephalomyelitis⁶ and polyneuritis.⁷

The range of subjects covered is impressive, from infectious diseases like typhoid fever and hepatitis to more specific conditions such as amyloidosis,



Figure 2: Dr PN Laha addressing an Annual function of the Gajra Raja Medical College, Gwalior

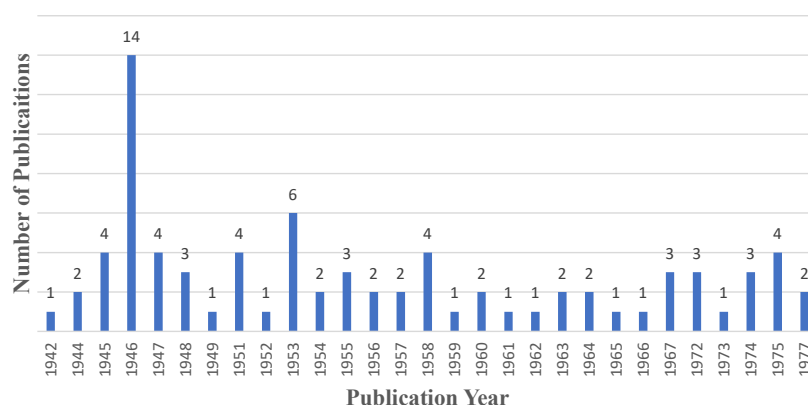


Figure 3: Timeline of Publications of Dr PN Laha (Source: PubMed⁵)

neuroblastoma, and acute malaria. This breadth indicates a multifaceted approach to Medicine, highlighting a keen interest in common and rare diseases. A notable feature of Dr Laha's work is the emphasis on infectious diseases, particularly in the context of Indian populations. Publications addressing conditions such as typhoid fever, malaria, and tuberculosis (TB) reflect these contexts' significant public health challenges. His research into treatment modalities, such as antibiotic therapy and the management of malaria, showcases an engagement with pressing health issues. His publications provide valuable clinical insights, particularly in the diagnostics and management of various conditions. For instance, explorations of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) levels in liver cirrhosis and the relationship between blood groups and pulmonary TB indicate an effort to bridge laboratory findings with clinical practice.

Noteworthy studies, like the large-scale analysis of the 1957 influenza epidemic⁸ and the study of 1,000 cases of tetanus,⁹ suggest his solid methodological approach and a commitment to Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM). This scale lends credence to his findings and enhances their applicability to broader populations. Many of the publications seem to address issues directly relevant to the health of Indian communities. This local focus not only emphasizes the public health implications of his work but also indicates a commitment to improving healthcare outcomes in the region. Topics such as the role of vitamin D, vitamin B12, and folic acid in treatment regimens show a forward-thinking mindset, acknowledging the nuances of nutritional deficiencies and their impact on health.

Dr PN Laha's publication list reveals a dedicated researcher and clinician whose work significantly contributed to the academic community and public health

discourse. His focus on infectious diseases, combined with clinical applications and community relevance, underscores the importance of tailored medical research that meets the needs of specific populations.

Extracurricular Interests and Personal Traits

In addition to his academic accomplishments, Dr Laha had a rich array of extracurricular interests, which included drama, writing, and music. These interests complemented his professional life and highlighted his multifaceted personality. He was a great teacher and mentor and was known for his punctuality, honesty, and discipline, embodying the values of a dedicated physician. Dr Laha's strong clinical acumen, which emphasized the treatment of patients with minimal investigations and medications, showcased his deep understanding of patient care and his commitment to their well-being.

Conclusion

Dr P.N. Laha's contributions to Indian Medicine and infectious disease research made him a pioneering figure. His extensive education and qualifications from prestigious institutions in India and the UK laid a strong foundation for his impactful career. As a Professor of Medicine at Gajra Raja Medical College, Gwalior, he educated and mentored a generation of doctors and engaged in prolific research, producing 80 publications that addressed significant medical challenges and various subjects. His dedication to patient care, emphasizing minimal interventions, showcased his clinical acumen and commitment to effective treatment.

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