



**DR. S SURESH**  
THE ULTRASOUND PIONEER



Success is a fight between you and yourself. Dr. Suresh of Mediscan, believes this mantra is important for every person striving to achieve success through introspection and critical analysis of their actions.

The journey began in 1976, when Dr. Suresh's desire to pursue higher studies in medicine got stymied by the 'Reservation Policy', he decided to start an ultrasound center in Chennai. The research gave an insight into the various benefits of ultrasound, as a quick decision-making modality. The biggest takeaway was that there was no other modality at that time for pregnant women to look into the developing baby, an exciting prospect that technology

had arrived in India, and for the first time, real-time imaging was available.

With a new modality and technology to work with, Dr. Suresh came up with a feedback system, with the doctors in the city, and the decision to record every aspect of the diagnosis and the images. The feedback and documentation systems have helped Mediscan to improve their imaging techniques, their diagnosis and understanding the developing baby and the decision making during pregnancy. With the improved standard of living and better health, ultrasound has now become the standard procedure during pregnancy.

Back in 1984, Dr. Suresh diagnosed hydrocephalus (fluid in the brain) in an 18-week old foetus. The pregnancy was terminated but the doctor stated that the baby looked fine, at which the parents got agitated. Dr. Suresh requested the foetus for examination and went ahead to show the distressed parents that there was indeed a problem in the brain. This gave birth to the one-of-its-kind perinatal pathology unit at Mediscan, which Dr. Suresh says is the "conscience keeper" for them.

Just diagnosis and imaging didn't help many patients. Dr. Suresh had a patient whose baby had a blockage in the kidney, and there was no precedent to the case. This then led to Mediscan starting treatment procedures

wherein the natural history of the problem was researched and advised upon, which led to the creation of the Counselling unit. It is a unique concept at Mediscan, wherein patients were counseled about the issue and the team researched into the problem from all angles, which led to the development of the genetics lab, and gave insights into chromosomal abnormalities and now Mediscan can detect such problems at 12-13 weeks, rather than after birth. Some of the diagnosis also required treatment, and this led to the first intra-uterine blood transfusion procedure where about 300 babies have been saved so far! A fall out of this was the complicated twins treatment, where intra-uterine surgeries were performed and about 200 twins have been operated on. Mediscan has thus seen the growth of highly specialized foetal medicine at its center.

The huge achievement of Mediscan is in bringing down the earliest fetal abnormality detection from 20 weeks to 12-13 weeks. About 68% of abnormalities can be detected at this stage, including 45% of cardiac anomaly where the heart in the foetus is about 1cm with four chambers and valves. Informed choice and decision can be made much earlier rather than later where emotional bonding comes into place. Dr. Suresh says, "We see 7-10 abnormal cases a day and every day is a new challenge and huge responsibility. All the research and literature we add to the existing information and talk to others. This, in turn, led to the creation of the Twins Unit, where specific research is done."

Fetal Care Research Foundation (non-profit) was started to provide preventive, supportive and curable care for fetal defects. With the increasing number of birth defects being diagnosed, there was a need for further testing and treatment. Mediscan has tied up with generous donors and other foundations to provide financial support to such patients and their families. This gave the input to start a support group for rare diseases



and 400 children being taken care of. They require an enzyme to be replaced every month, which is done free of cost, through India Medical Advisory board, thanks to Dr. Sujata's initiatives.

The Center of Excellence for Rare Disorders was initiated along with VHS, that provides comprehensive care for the children. The Center also is active in the prevention of mental retardation, where they have screened 35,000 newborns at government hospitals. Early detection and preventive measures save lives and the Center has been advocating the need for newborn screening.

To promote ultrasound in the peripheral areas, Mediscan started the rural ultrasound program. They conducted camps to train the doctors by screening patients, which reduced the travel costs for patients. The combined effort between Mediscan and the local doctors resulted in effective treatment.

Dr. Suresh says he is working to establish centers of excellence in the government sector. A plan was given for 176 primary health centers to train 2 doctors in every district. "We audited all their images for 1 year and abnormal situations was identified by those doctors in the PHC. This has helped take informed decisions about treatment in local hospitals or away. Such an exercise has happened only in Tamil Nadu. Right from 1982, Mediscan has been providing free scan services in Government hospitals and have thus provided close to 1.2 lakh free scans to date."

Mediscan has been path-breaking right from the beginning. Dr. Suresh points out "the first training program for doctors all over the country was conducted as early as 1984. Today close to 5,000 odd doctors have been trained through Mediscan." Education, quality, and uniformity across the board is essential, stresses Dr. Suresh. Mediscan now has a couple of collaborations. One with PerkinElmer for high-quality genetic testing to bring down the cost. And another with



the International Society of Ultrasound and Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Dr. Suresh is their ambassador to India to formulate a training module, providing training at the PG level itself.

Dr. Suresh explains, "with idle machines and time to spare, we allowed poor patients to come and we provided free service. I feel obligated to them for providing me much knowledge and it gives me supreme satisfaction. One of the first patients with intrauterine transfusion is now a graduate. The family comes to celebrate his birthday every year, we have given a good citizen for the country", he says proudly.

Dr. Suresh does miss the general practice days and rues that expectations are different now. In the age of Google, information is available but a doctor is still required to assimilate and put together the necessary treatment plan that focuses on the patient.

The Core team of Mediscan has been together for the past 36 years. The team vibes well and share the responsibilities. They communicate with each other and at any time, four doctors are involved in each case for wider input base. Dr. Suresh explains, "When you thoroughly enjoy what you do, it is not stressful. I strongly believe doors open when good work and service is done."

Mediscan is more than just a scan center. To many, it is the hope of finding a solution to their many health problems. And Dr. Suresh and his team are there just to deliver that ray of hope, being a true Champion of Chennai!

- Shobana Ravi

