



LET'S FACE it. Allergies are prevalent. The early morning sniffing along corridors, emergency visits for nebulisations during the haze, the unending itching and scratching, or the frank anaphylaxis after accidental exposure to contaminated food... They are everywhere! Allergies impact a large proportion of our patients' lives, changing the way they have been used to living and making them take extra precautions, which may affect their families as well. Their illnesses may begin at a young age and persist into adulthood. To control their conditions, these patients are bound to medications and treatment plans for a good many years. When their symptoms flare up, their sleep is disturbed; their schoolwork, affected; their mood, lowered; and overall quality of life, decreased. 30 to 40 percent of the world's population is afflicted by allergic diseases and these numbers keep rising. There is therefore a growing need for specialists, researchers and work in this area.

My decision to train and practice in the field of allergy and immunology was largely influenced by this spectrum of patients, which I commonly encountered during my basic paediatric training. The age-old wisdom in the management of allergic diseases was that they could never be cured, only controlled, which I realised was frustrating to many of my patients. They sought multiple medical consults, shifted their regimens according to varied advice, had misconceptions about their allergies, and were non-compliant due to inconveniences or poor recommendations.

What really called out to me was a simple fundamental need that was seemingly unfulfilled. I felt that the missing link in good control of symptoms for our patients was a reliable specialist whom they could return to for regular follow-ups, who could track their progress and tailor therapies according to their requirements. I wanted to be that doctor whom patients could trust and continue to visit. I wanted to be



JOINING THE RANKS OF AN EXCITING MEDICAL DISCIPLINE

By Dr Mohana Rajakulendran

than we have ever been. This was probably unimaginable just two to three decades ago. These are exhilarating years in the sphere of allergy and immunology, and I greatly enjoy being part of this movement that aims to benefit the large population of patients we care for.

Another motivational factor for my choice of practice was definitely the team of doctors I work with in my institution. They consist of truly inspiring professors and mentors who continue to be at the forefront of research in the field allergy and immunology within the region. They constantly encourage us with new and stimulating ideas for clinical research, and are not afraid to offer novel therapies and bring in new treatment options for the benefit of our patients. Currently, we are the only institution in the country offering oral immunotherapy for peanut desensitisation, and immunotherapy to other common food allergens including wheat, egg and cow's milk will soon be available. My team was also involved in securing subcutaneous immunoglobulin for the convenience of home therapy in selected patients with immunodeficiencies.

I like to dream big and thus really couldn't miss out on the opportunity of contributing to promising research and developments in this constantly progressing field of Medicine! ■

there to provide the information that they needed, answer the questions that they had, build rapport and see them through their early years into maturity, as they grew through their allergies.

The allergist's main role is that of good control. However, there should also be a sustained interest in finding new ways to prevent and to cure. I find the discipline of allergy and immunology thrilling simply because it holds abundant promise. So much remains unknown in this field! I am very fortunate to be part of this era of exciting research for new strategies, even for the primary prevention of allergies, starting from the antenatal period to the first few years of life. We now have new therapies like oral and sublingual immunotherapy, and also conduct trials on more and more monoclonal antibodies and biologics targeting underlying immunologic pathways - which means that we are now closer to cures in the realms of skin, respiratory and food allergies



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