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photo feature



He was to fly with Sanjay Gandhi on the day his aircraft crashed, but could not go due to work. A few hours later, he was tending to Sanjay's mangled body at Delhi's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital.

THE GENTLE GIANT

Dr Pradeep Chowbey pioneered bariatric surgery in India and is now perfecting a cure for diabetes. The high flier loves to innovate

By Gunjan Sharma

Art collector, golfer, pilot, gastroenterology surgeon... Dr Pradeep Chowbey is all rolled into one. The 59-year-old joint managing director and chief of surgery at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi, believes in living life to the fullest. Be it saving a life on the operating table or pick-

ing a designer sari for his wife, Chowbey does it with passion and clinical precision.

The son of a doctor, Chowbey says he always knew he would be a surgeon. "Surgery thrills me like nothing else. And I am always looking to innovate, develop new surgical procedures," he says. After his masters in cancer surgery

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Chowbey has helped put many important personalities on the track to good health. They include the Gandhi family, the Dalai Lama and President Pratibha Patil.

The surgeon holds the record for the fastest gall bladder laparoscopic surgery, which he performed in 4 minutes 28 seconds. He has entered the Limca Book of Records for performing the maximum number of minimally invasive surgeries.

"His thoughts have inspired many of my paintings. I evolved as an artist in his company," says wife Susmita. "We have a collection of works of great painters, including M.F. Husain and S.H. Raza."

PHOTOS: ARVIND JAIN

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His day at the hospital starts at 9 a.m. At noon, he takes a 15-minute break in his office. Then he performs surgeries, meets patients, and discusses the next day's schedule and other administrative work with colleagues before he heads home at 9.30 p.m.

Breakfast in his car is generally a sandwich and a glass of juice; lunch is the same fare. Dinner is a family affair, with sabji, roti and dal. "Rajma-chawal is his favourite," says Susmita.



"He has always been a very supportive father," says daughter Amisha. For every new tune she learns on the piano, her father is her first audience.



from Jabalpur Medical College in 1977, he went to New York to work at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and returned after two years. "I believe in learning world-class skills from wherever I can. But I want to serve my own country," he says.

He introduced bariatric surgery, to cure obesity, in India. "Operating on a man weighing over 300kg, whose heart, kidney, blood pressure are in a mess, is a big challenge. You cannot perform the surgery with conventional instruments. You need long-handled instruments, a specially designed operation table, and great expertise to handle a huge body," says Chowbey.

He is now perfecting a technique to surgically cure diabetes. "It's almost in its final stage of getting accepted worldwide," says Chowbey. No wonder, his junior colleagues call him a 'gentle giant'. "We all are amazed by his talent as a surgeon," says Dr Vandana Soni, his colleague for 15 years. "He is extremely informative and supports innovations. At the same time, he gives a lot of freedom to his juniors." ●