Amandev Aulakh: leading by example to effect change

Jane S Thornton

Dr Amandev Aulakh espouses love of community and representation. Already an accomplished sports medicine physician who has travelled the world, she will never forget her roots and the importance of diversity and inclusion in sport and exercise medicine. Amandev describes herself as South Asian and is proud to represent the Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) community and has consciously, in addition to her sport medicine practice, continued to work in family practice to maintain that community connection.

Amandev’s path into medicine was not a sure thing. Her parents emigrated to Canada from India in the late 1970s. Hardworking and creative, they quickly found work to start building their foundations and life in Canada—her father as an airport limousine driver and her mother in a local factory. Amandev, one of four girls in her family, learnt early the value of personal sacrifice in building the dream of a bright future and the role of family and community to ensuring dreams become reality.

With these supports in place, Amandev applied herself from an early age, working hard to achieve academic success. She balanced her workload with an equal dedication to sport. This included playing for the McMaster University Field Hockey Club during her undergraduate and graduate degrees, and now to playing soccer, running and yoga.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Having studied physical activity in a multi-ethnic Canadian population and obesity in Indigenous children and adults, she continues to remain engaged with the lessons learnt through that research. Above and beyond her current work as a general practitioner (GP) or sport and exercise medicine (SEM) physician, Amandev is a dedicated teacher. Her lessons in teaching article is a moving description of guiding a medical student through an end-of-life conversation and the ensuing debrief. ‘We are not robots,’ she wrote. ‘We have the privilege of witnessing the most intimate moments of our patients’ lives. Giving ourselves permission to be moved by our work was part of this transition from medical student to resident to physician. In some situations, you just need to cry.’

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Amandev noticed from her early days in her SEM fellowship that there were no female South Asian role models or mentors. She dedicated her volunteer time over the last ten years to creating opportunities for those SEM physicians who follow, giving her energy and expertise locally, provincially, nationally and internationally. As part of these efforts, she is involved both at the provincial level in SEM at the Ontario Medical Association and has contributed at the national level with the Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine (CASEM). The aim of this work continues to be that whether it be in event coverage or in the delivery of continuing professional development, Amandev advocates for the inclusion of diverse faces in at the forefront of sport medicine coverage and practice in Canada.

She said it best herself: ‘To effect change, you have to lead by example.’

In 2014, at the start of her SEM career, Amandev actively volunteered and was recruited locally to be part of the medical coverage for the Toronto 2015 Pan American and ParaPan American Games which were being hosted in her own backyard. Working with the adaptive athletes during the ParaPan American Games, she realised there was little or no medical representation from the Asian community there either. Her efforts to create change resulted in her being selected to the following 2019 ParaPan American Games and the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games Medical teams. She has thrived in each position and continues to pave the way for her BIPOC colleagues and set an example of leadership for all Canadian SEM physicians.

For Amandev, there is no fundamental distinction between her care and treatment to improve the health of people within her local community as a GP or the health of elite athletes from across the country competing far from home. Whether she is supporting individual members of marginalised populations or the minority sporting elite pushing the margins of human performance, for Amandev, medicine is medicine.

Amandev attributes the successes in her career to date to the ‘community’ of sport medicine and allied health professionals she works with—sport medicine requires a team approach from the outset and that, to her, is the biggest lesson learnt.

Dr Amandev Aulakh

Twitter Jane S Thornton @janesthornton

Acknowledgements JST would like to acknowledge Dawn Haworth, CASEM Executive Director, for development of the idea and providing biographical information for the article.

Funding The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests JST is an editor of BJSM.

Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval This study does not involve human participants.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

© Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2022. No commercial re-use. See rights and permissions. Published by BMJ.


Accepted 16 February 2022 Published Online First 23 February 2022


ORCID iD Jane S Thornton http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3519-7101