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METROPLUS

# WEEKEND

HYDERABAD • SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2008

A portrait of Dr. Raghu Ram, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white shirt and a patterned tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a white structure.

## DAPPER DOC

Dr. Raghu Ram  
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# Star surgeon

**CHATLINE KOMAL VIJAY SINGH** unravels the person behind the persona of celebrated breast surgeon, Dr. P. Raghu Ram

**M**anning the front desk in the absence of staff who may be personally attending to a patient is something that comes naturally to this surgeon. KIMS-Ushalakshmi Centre for Breast Diseases' resident staff uphold the sentiments of their mentor, Dr. Raghu Ram. A patient walks in the door and is immediately enveloped by the warmth and reassurance that permeates the air.

The oncoplastic breast surgeon smiles easily as he prepares to walk down the path of his memories. An only child, he led a protected and pampered childhood. With both his parents being doctors, coping with hectic schedules, they decided not to have more kids. His father is Dr. P.V. Chalapathi Rao, former President of the Association of Surgeons of India (ASI), and renowned gynaecologist, Dr. Ushalakshmi, in whose name the centre is named, is his mother. "My mother sacrificed her private practice to be with me in the evening. She used to make me do my homework. I was happy to rest in the nest built by my parents, enjoyed my childhood, but it did leave me vulnerable to face the world," he admits.

When he had to leave for Sidharth Medical College at Vijayawada, he was not put in a hostel: "My maternal grandparents moved from their village near Guntur to set up house there. My parents, instead of buying a mobike for me that I wanted, bought a car. They felt it was safer." A happy-go-lucky guy, he used to study only before the exams. The cultural secretary of his college, his car was often spotted in front of bars and restaurants. "I never drank or smoked, but, yes, my duty was to clear the bills and escort my friends safely back to their hostel. I just

didn't want to upset my grandparents. When phone calls were made to my parents about the car sightings, they professed complete faith in me. I took my first drink with dad at Palace Heights," he reminisces.

Grit and fierce determination came to him while doing MS at Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore. The stamp of being the son of the President-elect of the ASI was on him. There was the feeling he would waltz through exams. "This bothered me. I studied like crazy and stood first. After clearing the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) exam for which the pass percentage is 20 per cent, I landed in Glasgow in the coldest ever winter of the past 30 years. Not wanting to waste money on shared heating for which no one was paying, I would wrap myself with a duvet to study," he tells. Living frugally, he learnt to cook his own food. He passed the FRCS exam from three out of the four colleges in the UK. "The high point of his professional life," for the triple fellowship, he passed through 60 examiners in a month and a half.

In the late 90s, when breast surgery was evolving as a subspecialty in the UK, he found his interest lay there. As kismet would have it, his mother, during a visit to

the UK, was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"My mom is a gritty survivor, but in India breast care is still a lottery. With no separate breast units and in the absence of evidence-based protocol, I thought of setting up a centre in Hyderabad. I also wanted to be with my parents. With old age taking a toll, they could no longer travel and were reluctant to leave Hyderabad," he says. He and his wife were about to get their British citizenship. His parents dissuaded him, saying that he would be moving from an organised to disorganised society. But he felt it was better to be part of a system where his presence could make a difference. And so, he returned last year to his parents and set up the Centre for Breast Diseases.

A man who makes his own rules, Dr. Raghu Ram's practice ends at 5.30 p.m. "Money after a few hundreds has no value. The quality of life is important. My relaxation is giving a bath to my younger son in the evening. I love attending art dos, going for plays and classical dance events to which my friend, Jayesh Ranjan, Andhra Tourism MD, has introduced me. I look forward to going with my wife and two sons to Sailing Club and Secunderabad Club," he discloses.

With good friends like Satish Reddy, COO of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, "a most down-to-earth man whose idea was the Brest Cancer Foundation," Dr. Raghu Ram is "happy to be back home." Trying to set new benchmarks in breast care is his sole endeavour. He quotes Swami Vivekananda to declare that one idea is his dream.

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# Star surgeon

## Scaling heights

He was scaling the heights of his profession in the UK. He had found his calling of being a breast surgeon and was the toast of the fraternity of surgeons there. His heart, however, was pulling him towards India and Hyderabad in particular. Bidding adieu to distant shores, he decided the pinnacle of his career and the realisation of his dreams lay in Hyderabad.

## Working hard

Dr P. Raghu Ram's achievements sit easy on his shoulders for he has worked tirelessly to achieve the stature that he now enjoys. His easy demeanour and affable looks belie his heavy-duty designations — Director, KIMS-Ushalakshmi Centre for Breast Diseases, and CEO, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation.

## Breast screening

Breast cancer awareness took centre stage in October in Hyderabad, thanks to Dr. Raghu Ram's efforts. Two senior breast screening trainers were flown from London to oversee the screening programme. Mobile breast screening was undertaken free of cost at pre-designated locations in Hyderabad.

## Bringing Boney M

Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation (UBCF) also brought pop group of yesteryears, Boney M, for a performance. US Ambassador David Mulford and his wife Jeanni Mulford, a breast cancer survivor, were the guests of honour.

