

Physician optimistic about medical advances

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Dr. Kiritkumar Patel is as cosmopolitan a resident as you will find in a relatively homogeneous suburb like Farmington Hills.

The newly-promoted director of Grace Hospital's respiratory, pulmonary and intensive care units was born of Indian parents in Tanzania in East Africa, received his medical training at Martin Luther University in East Germany and met his South Korean wife, Ohksok, while working in West Germany.

It's no stranger to California, either. The 33-year-old father of a daughter Ameta, 4, and a son, Vikram, 1, recently completed a two-year fellowship in pulmonary disease at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

"I probably wouldn't be here if it weren't for my early education," acknowledges Patel.

"When I attended school (in Tanzania) we were still under British rule. Students in each grade were divided into five or six classes, according to whether they leaned towards science or the arts.

'When I attended school (in Tanzania) we were still under British rule.'

— Dr. Kiritkumar Patel

"My interest then was in biology," he said. "When I was offered an inter-governmental scholarship to study medicine in East Germany, I gladly accepted it."

Patel's siblings also did well by their British-oriented education. His sister is a gynecologist in Cleveland, while his brother works in Tanzania as an electrical engineer.

"Medicine in Tanzania when I went to school was backward about 15 to 20 years behind more advanced countries, and we had no university. There was one good one in Uganda that served these countries," Patel said. Although Patel "felt free" while receiving what he considers high-quality medical training in East Germany, he witnessed "big problems for the people who live there."

"If they want to visit other countries, they can't," he said.

"Communication is another problem. They feel insecure about confiding things to other people." Such limited exchanging of ideas vanished where medicine was concerned, added Patel.

"East and West German books were sold in both countries, and we heard speakers from both places. Maybe it's because of the pride they all have in being German," he said.

WHEN THE TOPIC turns to new developments in respiratory and pulmonary medicine, Patel exudes enthusiasm.

The Wayne State University Medical School faculty member believes lung cancer patients will soon benefit from an early detection method known as laser bronchoscopy.

The still-experimental technique involves injecting patients with fluorescent dyes. Within 48-72 hours, tumors in the body will then fluoresce. Physicians may view even the smallest tumors by inserting a quartz fiber which emits laser light into the bronchial tubes. "It's highly experimental now, and the cost is staggering. Also, the dye has not yet been approved by the Food and Drug Administration."

"But I hope to see its use expanded. I think the best way to improve survival rates is to detect cancer at a very early stage," said Patel.

FOR LUNG PATIENTS likely to exhibit the side effects caused by ventilation, or breathing machines, Patel sites another noteworthy step forward.

"For some patients, conventional ventilation machines can cause disturbances of the lung, heart and kidneys," Patel said.

The "high-frequency jet ventilation machine" presents an alternative method for patients with particular



photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The intensive care unit at Grace Hospital is under the direction of Dr. Patel. Head nurse Val Gokenbach (center) watches the condition of patients in intensive care from the control console with patient unit clerk Linda Burnett (left).

respiratory and heart problems, he said.

Instead of assisting the lungs in inhaling and exhaling, the Swedish-developed ventilator delivers numerous small puffs of air, and then circulates the air within the lung.

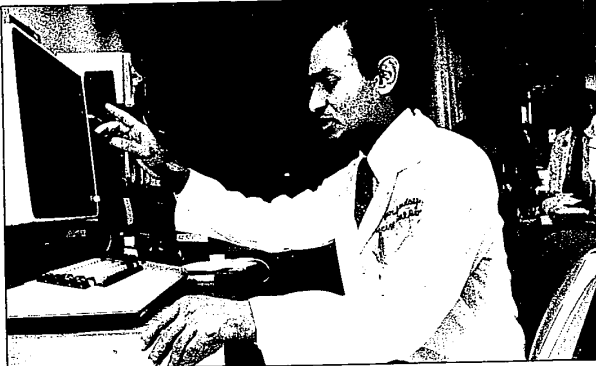
Like laser bronchoscopy, high-frequency jet ventilation is still experimental and is used on a very limited basis in the United States.

ALTHOUGH AMERICAN health care, in Patel's opinion, "is much more technological in the U.S. than in Germany, this country has plenty of catching up to do in sports medicine."

"I don't think there's a country further ahead in sports medicine than East Germany," he said.

"Everything there is sponsored through the government. Athletes are selected and trained in the best way possible very early on."

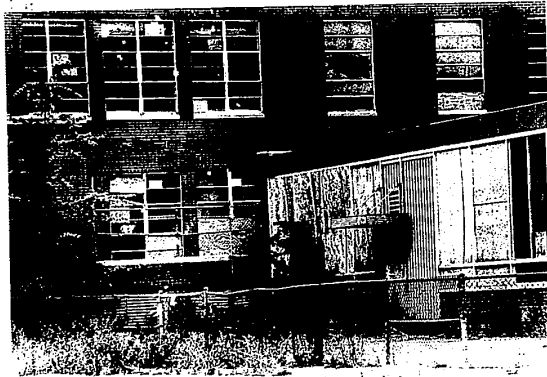
"They're given total financial support. Here, you're on your own if you want to reach the Olympics. For East Germans, politics and sports go more together than in the United States."



The computer has become an important tool in the science of medicine. Dr. Patel is shown at the main computer terminal in the pulmonary care unit. The computer is used to store information about the patient and provide diagnostic help to physicians.



Dr. Kiritkumar Patel



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Broken windows and overgrown trees and brush give a forbidding look to the once-busy Bond Elementary School. The

school was closed by the school district nine years ago. A developer plans to build offices on the site.

Dilapidated school conversion overdue

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"tentative" builder on the project is Parliament Construction Co. of Southfield. More than \$3 million has been committed to the renovation effort, the developer added.

The school has been closed for approximately nine years. Homeowners living around the site say the property has been allowed to deteriorate in recent months.

"It looks like it's deteriorated into a big storage bin down there," says Don Meade, former president of the Oakland's Homeowner Association. "It's used as a bus depot for SEMTA bus riders. Windows are broken, plywood's been pulled off, the building's been left to deteriorate. The building itself is getting to be a monstrosity, a white elephant in the neighborhood."

Hal Rowe, supervisor of Farmington Hills' zoning division, says after residents complained to the city, he asked Prisk to board up openings in the school building.

PRISK ADMITS "the place is a shambles at this

point." He says there are various reasons for its sorry condition.

One reason is that unexpected delays have prevented final sale of the school and abandoned, unsupervised buildings are an open invitation to youngsters and thieves looking for salvagable construction materials.

Another reason for the state of disrepair, Prisk says, is that the school district has allowed engineers hired by Hughes to strip away indoor walls to help determine how the building should be renovated.

Hughes says he wishes security was tighter on the property he plans to own next month but praises school officials for being "extraordinarily cooperative" in negotiations with him over sale of the property.

If the sale goes through as planned next month, Hughes will pay the district an \$85,000 down payment and two more annual \$85,000 payments at a yearly interest rate of 10 percent. He already has paid the school district a non-refundable payment agreement included a provision to donate 2.5 acres to the city where two baseball diamonds and adjacent parking lot now stand.



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