

Mr Chancellor,

Mr Robin (Ram Prasad) Sengupta is the founder and Director of the Institute of Neurosciences, Kolkata. He has an international reputation in the field of neuroscience and for his humanitarian work in delivering excellent, affordable healthcare to the people of Kolkata. Among his many achievements has been the award of ‘Neurosurgeon of the Millennium’ by the Neurological Society of India, and the Vivekananda Samman Award, for social service in medicine, conferred by the former President of India in 2012. In Rome last year, he was declared the winner of the Medal of Honour by the World Federation of Neurological Surgeons. The Medal of Honour is considered to be the equivalent of an Oscar in neurosurgery, the ultimate accolade awarded by the world body of neurosurgeons, and we trust it will be accompanied by a red carpet ceremony on the scale of the Academy Awards when it is presented to him next year. Many of our students will be thinking: ‘Mr Sengupta – I know that name’. The more observant among them will have seen that we have the Robin Sengupta Lecture Theatre here on campus, named after him in tribute to his international reputation and contribution to neurosurgical treatment in Newcastle over a period of 40 years. The plaque was unveiled by Sir Miles Irving, Chair of Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, in July 2003.

Robin’s considerable achievements and determination are in the face of early life adversity. He was born in Chittagong, 200 miles from Calcutta, as it was then. He was the second son of a poor family who could not afford to send him to school, so he learned from books obtained from others. He helped to support his family by selling bananas on the streets, but from an early age he was determined to study medicine. When he moved to Calcutta in an attempt

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to get into medical school, it was without any letters of recommendation from educators, and his initial attempts met with failure. A chance meeting with a kindly stranger (whom he never saw again) on a park bench whilst reflecting on his future, led him to obtain support from an entrance officer to Calcutta University. He graduated from that University in 1961 and subsequently continued his studies at Harvard Medical Centre before obtaining his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (UK) in 1967 and moving to Newcastle.

From his appointment in 1978, Robin Sengupta worked tirelessly in Newcastle during his time as a Consultant Neurosurgeon in the NHS to deliver high-quality neurovascular neurosurgery, pioneering new surgical techniques at this time. The outcomes from his intracranial aneurysm operations led to referrals from around the UK and internationally. His vision, however, was to deliver outstanding and affordable healthcare to the people of Kolkata. As he told the *Telegraph* newspaper in 2002, ‘When I realised the area that I came from needed my help, I had to do something. Before we started work there, people from east India had to travel a long way or even had to go abroad to get the treatment they needed’.

In 1997, he had established an autonomous Society-registered Neurological Centre in Kolkata in collaboration with Peerless Hospital and the B.K. Roy Research Institute. This was self-sustaining and became the first Centre accredited to the National Board of Examination for teaching postgraduate students in the field of Neurology and Neurosurgery in Kolkata. But, disappointed by the limited opportunities available to manage the vast numbers of poor people afflicted by neurological illness in Kolkata (a city and suburbs with a population estimated at 14.5 million), Robin Sengupta conceived the vision for how a new unit could grow and raised the necessary

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funding. Thus, the Institute of Neurosciences-Kolkata (or IN-K), a one-specialty hospital for neurosciences, was born. IN-K is a charitable organisation running in collaboration with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and Government of West Bengal. Any profit is ploughed back into supporting patient care. The hospital was built with donations from all over the world. Robin has also given most of his personal lifetime savings to IN-K. It has 150 beds and is fully air-conditioned; the underprivileged are treated equally without compromising their basic comfort and medical care, a very unusual model in the Indian healthcare system. Patients from other parts of India now come to Kolkata for neurological consultations and surgery, and Robin's achievements in Kolkata featured recently on the BBC's 'Inside Out' programme. His nominator for this honorary degree, Professor David Burn, says 'it is humbling to see how Robin has brought IN-K to life, in a central part of Kolkata previously inhabited by drug addicts, and how he continues to devote himself to seeing patients and developing neurosciences in the city.'

Robin, I am told by colleagues here at Newcastle, still has the energy of someone half his age. From 2002, he has held emeritus consultant status with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and now works as Director of the Institute of Neurosciences in Kolkata. He spends 15 days per month in Kolkata and the rest of his time in Newcastle, where he provides mentorship to neurosurgical trainees. We are delighted to welcome today Robin's wife, Tapati, and his daughter Anita who are accompanying him on this happy occasion.

IN-K is not the end of Robin Sengupta's grand vision – he is developing two additional projects: a seven-storey building nearby, which Robin intends to purchase and equip to provide additional services and much-needed in-patient beds. Even more ambitiously, he is lobbying businessmen and politicians to

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purchase and develop a 40-acre greenfield site just outside Kolkata into a Campus for Neurosciences Research, Education and Training (to be named ‘Snayu Thirtha’, a Sanskrit phrase meaning ‘centre of excellence for neuroscience’).

Mr Chancellor, for his lifelong and selfless dedication to the people of Newcastle and Kolkata by promoting the highest standards of excellence in the field of neurosurgery, and for realising his humanitarian vision for affordable healthcare in his field, I present to you Mr Robin Sengupta for the award of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Helen Berry, Public Orator

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