



Dr. Ida Belle Scudder (1900 - 1995)

Ida B. Scudder developed Radiology in CMC and was a pioneer of Radiotherapy, bringing its benefits to tens of thousands of cancer sufferers in southern India.



Ida Scudder (left) with her niece and namesake, Ida Belle Scudder

Ida B. Scudder (affectionately known as Ida B), was the daughter of Ida S. Scudder's brother Lewis. She was born on 15th July 1900, in Laurel, Nebraska – the same year that her illustrious aunt opened her first dispensary in Vellore. Ida B. Scudder dedicated her life to serving the people of India in the healing ministry. She willingly sacrificed her personal, family and professional goals, going where she was needed and taking up unfamiliar responsibilities, for the sake of this greater mission.

She received her M.D. from Women's College of Pennsylvania, achieving the highest marks of any student taking the National Medical Board examination in 1928. She planned to specialise in Child Health, but in 1931 she left her job as a resident in Paediatrics responding to an urgent call for her to help cover staff vacancies in Vellore.

Arriving in India she taught Anatomy and ran the Eye and ENT services. In 1933 she took charge of the Department of Medicine, and a year later, Obstetrics. In each clinical field she was impressed by the large numbers of cancer patients, particularly those with oral and cervical carcinomas, with only surgery available for a few operable cases.

She loved both Paediatrics and Obstetrics, but by the mid-1930s Vellore was desperate for a trained radiologist. Ida B was asked to respond to this need. “The last thing in the world I would have normally chosen was radiology,” she says in her biography, but then goes on, “I have never regretted doing so, as I really enjoyed it.”

She trained in Radiology in New York, with Dr. William Meyer, who taught her to strive for the best possible results with whatever equipment was available. She studied Medical Physics and Radiotherapy, under the well-known physicist, [Dr Edith Quimby](#). Aged 38, she completed the LRCP and MRCS examinations in England, and had further training in radiology in Cambridge.

Returning to Vellore in 1939, she developed diagnostic and therapeutic radiology services, starting with one x-ray machine and a radium machine for brachytherapy. She served as Registrar and Acting Medical Superintendent and played a key role in CMC’s transition to the MBBS course and co-education. Painstakingly she raised funds to acquire diagnostic, deep X-ray and telecobalt facilities, and to build the Radiotherapy Ward. Alongside this she committed herself to weekly 'Roadsides', providing family medicine to the rural community.



In 1948 Ida B obtained the Diploma of The American Board of Radiology. Until 1950, she was the only doctor for radiodiagnosis and radiotherapy, treating cancer patients, reporting X-rays, checking set-ups, supervising technologists, and initiating postgraduate training in these two fields. In 1951 she handed over Diagnostic Radiology to Dr Donald Paterson, and focused primarily on the newly founded Department of Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine. She started training programmes for technologists as well as the Diploma in Medical Radiology course, and helped conduct the first M.D. Radiology exams of the Madras University.

During her tenure, the department at Vellore developed into a national centre for post-graduate training in Radiotherapy, which in those days meant the broad field of Clinical Oncology. The Department had many 'firsts' in India: the first Telecobalt Unit in the 1950s, the first Nuclear Medicine section, the first afterloading techniques for cervical cancer, the first Iridium-192 interstitial implants for head and neck cancer, the first separate Chemotherapy Department, all in the 1960s and the first 45 MV Betatron in the 1970s. A long list of Vellore postgraduates went on to head departments of Radiotherapy all over India and abroad. The present well-established role of radiotherapy in cancer management in India owes a debt to Ida B. Scudder's leadership.



In the 1960s her trainees grew into leadership roles, but Ida B continued to be a clinician and mentor, the last of the Scudders to continue to serve in India. Construction of the Scudder Auditorium in 1966, as a memorial to her aunt, was a major milestone before her retirement from Vellore in 1967. She went on to set up Radiotherapy departments in Miraj and in Ambillikai before finally returning to live with her sister in the USA. She continued to encourage and assist CMC, serving on the Vellore Board, precursor to the Vellore CMC Foundation.

The Ida B. Scudder building, housing Radiation Oncology, and the Ida B. Scudder Isotope Laboratory, hosting Nuclear Medicine in CMC Vellore, are two concrete memorials to her service. But the more lasting legacies are the services she founded, the patients cared for, the doctors, radiologists, radiation oncologists, technologists and physicists, trained because Ida B cheerfully and wholeheartedly chose to give her life and dreams to a cause larger than herself.

Ida B. Scudder developed Radiology in CMC and was a pioneer of Radiotherapy, bringing its benefits to tens of thousands of cancer sufferers in southern India. She had great gifts of energy, curiosity, intelligence, and wisdom. Her generosity, kindness and dedication touched many. Dr. A. D. Singh, her successor, who had trained as a radiologist in the UK, described her as the most compassionate doctor he had ever met.

Adapted from an obituary of Dr. Ida B. Scudder, by Carl F. von Essen, M.D., (Int. J. Radiation Oncology Biol. Phys. Vol. 34, No. 1. p. 267. 1996) and from an article by Dr. Reena George, sourced from the biography 'Legacy and Challenge' by Jenifer Georgia, and the CMC Archives.

