

Eulogy

Read by Mr Mark Sullivan at Nilay's funeral on Friday 23rd May 2014

So what do I tell you about Nilay Nimit Sunil Patel, the consultant urological surgeon.

Surgery is an unforgiving field, and the type of surgery that Nilay excelled in – complex major renal surgery - is one of the most unforgiving. It is difficult to describe to someone who is not a surgeon what we must sometimes go through, the sometimes bitter experiences, the emotions we feel when we are facing failure. And these experiences bind us together – they bind us together as a band of brothers. For the surgeons gathered here today, we have lost a brother, a very special and a very dear brother.

Nilay came to Oxford with an impressive background. He was very proud of his time at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and never tired of telling us all he was a “Tit Hall man”. He made an eminently sensible decision to enter into Urology, balancing hard work with a cheeky mischievous approach. A good example of this balance was when he was awarded the prestigious European Association of Urology prize for best research thesis for his work on angiogenesis in kidney and bladder cancer. He collected the award in Berlin and that night he promptly spent most of the 10,000 euros prize on a single great night out.

After a fellowship in transplantation, Nilay was deservedly appointed as a consultant in Oxford and Milton Keynes last year. He had the manner and skillset of a well-established consultant from day one. The networks he had built up throughout his training were invaluable in improving interdepartmental cooperation.

Nilay had an avuncular attitude to all the junior doctors. Whether he had known them for 3 weeks or 3 years he would constantly advise the next step in their careers. However, this came with a price tag the need to feed his insatiable appetite for gossip. He would recycle this information (laced with a special blend of Patel embellishment) in endless hilarious anecdotes - told in his own unique style and peppered with a few special expletives!

Nilay had a passion for his chosen field of renal surgery. He was constantly pushing onwards – writing papers, establishing research networks, giving presentations. As part of the Oxford Renal Surgery Group he was determined to support their ambition of national and international recognition. This culminated most recently in his successful application for national commissioning funding for renal autotransplants - the only national commissioned procedure in urology. As recently as last Sunday, this work was presented as an invited guest lecture at the American Urology Association meeting in Orlando.

Alongside his busy surgical and family life, Nilay skilfully juggled many activities outside work including: playing golf, watching cricket & football, and eating steak. Nilay was successful in many ways. I cannot better Ralph Emerson, the American Philosopher. What he wrote is a distillation of Nilay, the person, and of his achievements in his all too short life:

To laugh often and love much;
to win the respect of intelligent persons
and the affection of children;
to earn the approbation of honest critics
and to endure the betrayal of false friends;
to appreciate beauty;
to find the best in others;
to give of one's self;
to leave the world a little better,
whether by a healthy child,
or a garden patch,
to have played and laughed with enthusiasm
and sung with exultation;
to know that even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived,
this is to have succeeded.

Nilay Patel: A life worth living. A man worth knowing. A friend worth having.