

## **The hand that rocked the cradle swears to eliminate childhood blindness**

In the year 2018 Dr Savleen Kaur from Chandigarh was working with a tertiary health care unit in Ophthalmology at Post Graduate Institute of Education and Research in Chandigarh. She had neither the salary nor a full time job. But what she had was an ardent wish to pursue research. She had done all her background work, but opportunities seemed to be eluding her.

Circa 2020: the young lady is working as an Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology in Advanced Eye centre at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research, Chandigarh.

The blessing came in the form of a fellowship the WOS-A scheme of the Department of Science and Technology (DST in March 1, 2019 which was the turning point of her life.



The WOS-A scheme provides platform to women scientists and technologists for pursuing research in basic or applied sciences and offer them opportunity to work as bench-level scientists. This scheme plays pivotal role in gender mainstreaming and also training and retaining women in the system as well as prevents brain drain from S&T system. The support is available in five disciplines under WOS-A are namely, Physical & Mathematical Sciences (PMS), Chemical Sciences (CS), Life Sciences (LS), Earth & Atmospheric Sciences (EAS) and Engineering Technology (ET)

Dr Savleen finished her post-graduation in ophthalmology from Maulana Azad Medical College in New Delhi. After marriage, she moved to Chandigarh. After waiting for a year, she joined as a senior resident at PGI and after that continued as a research associate at PGI only. There came a time when she sat jobless at home and wondered whether she would ever be able to continue in her field. DST gave her a platform to not only showcase her research but also gave her the opportunity to work in one of the best institutes of the country under her favourite mentor.

Dr Kaur says “I was looking for a podium to stand on. I was looking for a break to tell the world about my work and was ecstatic when I got it. I was among the seven in the country who got it in life sciences, and it made all the trouble worthwhile. I had a long break in work, with responsibility of family and kids. The scheme made me come back with full force.”

“I worked hard to have an in-depth knowledge of my subject. I was confident and I could defend the work I had done myself. Not to forget the guidance of my mentors Dr Amod Gupta and Dr Mangat Dogra ex HODs in Department of Ophthalmology at PGIMER, Dr Jagat Ram, current Director and Head of the department and Dr Jaspreet Sukhija, Additional Professor in the same department who taught me to work hard and keep aiming high. The support of my husband and in-laws is priceless” she adds.

Women aspiring to return to mainstream science after a break in career should never give up, she said. “Persistence and perseverance will always pay. We should believe in God and ourselves. Don’t ever think that family is pushing you back. It is making you stronger. Keep an eye open for schemes like these,” she added.

Now that she is in a permanent job, Dr. Kaur is looking forward to expanding her research. There are only a handful of dedicated pediatric ophthalmologists in the country and she wishes to fill this gap and work towards the elimination of childhood blindness in India by further research.

“To me WOS-A Scheme gave me an opportunity to pursue education, intellect and research in the field of pediatric ophthalmology. I would like to expand research in this sub-speciality and also like to teach and motivate others to fulfil the ever-increasing demand in this area.” Dr. Kaur pointed out.

“Women in a scientific career are like soldiers in the enemy territory. You can’t go back to where you came from and you have to fight in hostile environments. Keep your focus and your faith. Believe in yourself and your training. Luck favours those who are prepared for it!” she emphasised.