



Change agents

Norman Stewart Macpherson (1899–1972)

CMC Vellore's first male surgeon who came here
in response to Ida Scudder's request,
when we decided to start treating male patients at the hospital

Dr. Norman Stewart Macpherson FRCS (Eng) was born in England on 18th July



1899. He completed his basic medical training at St. Thomas Hospital, London and was accepted as a missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of England and the Church of England Zenana Mission of London on 11th March 1925.

Initially, he was posted to work in a remote area in Srinagar and later at Peshawar, in the North West Frontier Province of the then undivided India.

Dr. Macpherson came to Christian Medical College, Vellore in response to our founder, Dr. Ida S. Scudder's request in 1944, when the decision was made to treat male patients in the hospital. He was the first male surgeon and first faculty with the University and Medical Council of India-recognised postgraduate qualification, FRCS; hence, the first postgraduate teacher to be appointed to the department of General Surgery. In 1948, when the department was trifurcated, Dr. Macpherson became the head of Surgery III with Plastic Surgery as his special area of interest.

Dr. Macpherson was an excellent general surgeon, meticulous in his technique and an outstanding teacher of surgery for undergraduate and postgraduate surgical trainees. He was a source of inspiration to many postgraduates and others whom he took under his wing.



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Dr. Macpherson guided the department of General Surgery as its head, from 1956 till his retirement from the Christian Medical College, Vellore in March 1959. Even after returning to England, he kept in touch with his former colleagues, students and patients in India.

Dr. Macpherson also played several other roles, in addition to his responsibilities as Professor of Surgery and Head of Surgery III to fulfill specific needs of the institution. For a while, he was the Acting Medical Superintendent of the Hospital. Again, in the absence of the head of the department of Ophthalmology, he stepped in as Acting Head of that department too. He was a very strict Medical Superintendent and punctuality and discipline at work were his hallmarks. His ward rounds would begin exactly at 8.30am, not a minute early or late and KTS (Knife-to-Skin) was exactly at 7.30am! All the members of his operating team - anaesthetists, nurses and other members - had to be ready by 7.25 am when he was operating.

Dr. Macpherson was taken into God's presence on 30th May 1972 after a lifetime of devoted, faithful and inspiring service to India and to Christian Medical College, Vellore. His service here, in particular to the department of General Surgery in its formative years, as a pioneer surgeon and exemplary teacher, was invaluable.

The memory of the service of Dr. Macpherson still lingers in the minds of those who knew him personally, and I hope this narration will serve as a reminder of a humble, compassionate and fine human being who walked through the corridors of our institution.

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