Memorial Resolution
Maleakal S. Mathew, M.D.
Born, March, 1926, Kerala, India – Died June, 2018, St. Louis, Missouri

Maleakal S. Mathew, M.D. was certainly one of the most serviceable of the Indian jewels; in his case, one generously shared by the India of his birth with the U.S and other countries. He was the senior psychiatrist with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) of the IU Health Center from 1982 to 2004. During his tenure with CAPS, Dr. Mathew served thousands of IU students, treating their depressions, mood and thought disorders, anxieties and other difficulties that can make this human life so challenging. He did it with subtle skill, professionalism and compassion. Students and their families were grateful. They expressed their gratitude in a number of ways – simple thank-yous, letters detailing their improved quality of life after treatment as well as heartfelt personal acknowledgements in their dissertations. Dr. Mathew’s varied background enabled him to have a rich understanding of many world cultures – an understanding that greatly facilitated his therapeutic conversations with IU students.

Dr. Mathew’s medical degree was from Miraj Medical Center in Bombay (1948, Licentiate of College of Physicians and Surgeons, Bombay). Born in 1926 into a landed, intellectual family in Kerala, south India (near the setting of Arundhati Roy’s novel, The God of Small Things), he clearly had an informed and deeply thoughtful perspective on India. A natural raconteur, he loved telling the tales of the India of his boyhood, particularly those involving witty lower-level Indian civil servants subtly, conversationally besting British colonial officers. He also relished telling family stories, especially about his mother, a woman possessed of great strength of character. His father died when he was an adolescent, leaving him with the considerable responsibility of assisting with the rearing of his four younger brothers. After graduating from the Bombay Medical School he worked as a physician in the Middle East for several years, first for the Bahrain Petroleum Company (1950-53) and then for 12 years as a medical officer for the government of Qatar in Doha (1955-1967). Always thirsty for more knowledge, he was a graduate student at the R.G. Kar Medical College from 1953-1955 between these two positions in the Middle East. He passed the notoriously challenging M.B.B.S. medical exam in India in 1959.

IUB students from the Middle East greatly appreciated working with a physician whose understanding of their culture was deep and first hand. It can be challenging to sort out cultural factors affecting our students – especially international students – from the possible symptoms of emotional disturbance, so Dr. Mathew’s background was invaluable in helping him do this. Middle Eastern and Asian students, especially, referred others to him – “there is a great doctor at CAPS who understands us.” He certainly had a devoted following and enjoyed a strong reputation among U.S.-born students as well.

Returning to the trajectory of his career, he departed Doha in the mid-1960s and came to the U.S. with his wife and son. He continued his medical education by enrolling in an adult psychiatry residency at the Missouri Institute of Psychiatry, University of Missouri, St. Louis, from 1967 through 1972, doing a post-doctoral fellowship at their Institute for study and treatment of mental retardation during the latter two years. Rounding out his comprehensive psychiatric training, he was a fellow/faculty at a youth center affiliated with Washington University. His family was steeped in medicine. A younger brother practiced surgery in Canada, his wife was an Ob-Gyn doctor, and his son a nephrologist, now practicing in Eureka, California.
Dr. Mathew was much loved by CAPS staff and IUB students. The clinical staff valued his knowledge, which he was generous in sharing in clinical teams and consultations. His work ethic was exceptionally strong, eliciting fond jokes from the staff about, “Dr. Mathew, can you squeeze in one more patient?” This question occurred often enough that his retirement gift included a crystal vase, with the question etched on it. He often worked late and was heard to complain about those who arrived at work early, snagging all of the nearby parking spaces, so needed by the late-comers, he noted, who had to walk too far to be ‘almost on time.’ He would never allow a student in need to be turned away, frequently shortening his lunch hour to accommodate them.

During his tenure with CAPS he was asked by the Medical School to teach a course for medical students on the Bloomington campus. He always took great care to formulate their quiz questions so the medical students learned from taking the test. Other interactions with IU medical students involved 1) some psychiatric consultations for Riley Children’s Hospital, where he worked with medical students and psychiatry residents and 2) being asked to treat IUB medical students who might be experiencing depression or other problems.

He was an avid reader, particularly interested in the history of medicine and philosophy. He enjoyed sharing articles and books he thought would be of interest to others. He was an equally avid, and talented, tennis and squash player, always on the lookout for partners interested in a pickup game on a random Tuesday evening. If that was not possible he would settle for bridge, another favorite activity.

His was a long and illustrious life, of varied professional and personal experiences. He truly gave more than he took. When former staff and students return for a visit to CAPS, invariably their first question is “How is Dr. Mathew?” We are slowly learning to say – sometimes with a little difficulty -- after 92 years on this tumultuous earth, he is at peace.

We request that this memorial tribute to Maleakal Mathew be presented to members of the Bloomington Faculty Council, that it be preserved in its minutes and archive, and that after its presentation copies be sent to members of his family.

Nancy Stockton
Counseling and Psychological Services
Health Center
Indiana University Bloomington