



Mass. doc tackles weighty issues with pediatric care

Misra studies children with eating disorders

By **MATTHEW TRUMBULL**
INDIA New England Staff

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass. — Parents do all they can to assure that their own children will grow up healthy and strong, but Madhusmita Misra is working hard so that everyone's children can grow up into healthy adults. A pediatric endocrinologist and clinical researcher, her ground-breaking research is helping physicians better understand the physiological impact of anorexia and under-nutrition on youth.

"She is an incredibly talented and able person who everyone knows and expects to make great contributions to childhood health and medicine," says Dr. Anne Klibanski, chief of the neuroendocrine unit at Massachusetts General Hospital and mentor to Misra.

Misra, 42, is passionate about her research in pediatric medicine concerned that too little resources are directed to helping physicians understand how the bodies of children function and respond to medical treatment. "Children are not little adults," she says. "They are made up totally differently."

As a pediatric endocrinologist, she has studied the glands and hormones that drive the bodily functions of children, and she now researches the impact of under- and over-nutrition on bone density in youth —

a major predictor of the quality of health experienced later in life. "She has made major contributions in understanding the impact of nutritional disorders on normal developments and bone growth," Klibanski says.

Misra says bone density is developed primarily during youth and is a determinant of quality of health later in life. Children with low bone density are much more likely to develop osteoporosis as adults and suffer from elderly fractures as they enter the later years of their life. This not only reduces the quality of life during old age, but the related health complications place an undue burden on the health care system.

In the United States, under-nutrition caused by anorexia presents a major challenge to the healthy development of children, and Misra has been doing extensive research on the physiological impact of the condition on young bodies. Because those suffering from anorexia are usually sensitive about their condition and studies on anorexia are not usually structured with the psychological well-being of participants in mind, Misra does everything she can to create a non-judgmental and supportive environment for the patients in her studies. "[We tell them that] No one is going to talk about weight," Misra says, "and the girls really appreciate that."

She is very involved with the youth she studies and says she has a great appreciation for the dedication her young patients show toward her work. "They are truly altruistic," Misra says. "These are wonderful people because truly they hope to help other people later on. [In research] it takes

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Dr. Madhusmita Misra
Endocrinologist
Mass. General Hospital

a long time to get the results, so it might not benefit them directly."

However, she says the "black and white data" about bone density loss quantifies the impact of anorexia in a very concrete way that often motivates these youth to seek treatment.

In addition to her direct interaction with the youth she studies, Misra founded the New England Collaborative of Eating Disorder Providers in order to bring everyone involved in the treatment of anorexia together. Care providers from all disciplines meet here to share critical knowledge about the condition.

Her excellence in the medical field has won Misra numerous awards and distinctions throughout her career. Her most recent award is the 2006 Claflin Distinguished Scholar Award from MGH



Educator and researcher Dr. Madhusmita Misra studies the effect of anorexia on bone density in children.

and Harvard Medical School, and her most prized award is the 2003 Janet W. McArthur Award for Excellence in Clinical Research, Women in Endocrinology.

Though she has a distinguished career in

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Imam helps women who want to help themselves

Director of donor relations at Boston nonprofit fights all forms of discrimination

By **MATTHEW TRUMBULL**
INDIA New England Staff

BOSTON — When it comes to helping disadvantaged women, women have the best ideas for solving their own problems but often do not have sufficient resources to implement them. That is why, for over 20 years, the Boston Women's Fund has been there to provide women with grant money to bring their ideas to life.

"Time and again my experience has been, with the Boston Women's Fund, that women have the most astounding ideas about how to help themselves. And each time they run into a brick wall for lack of funding," Hayat Imam, director of donor relations for the Boston Women's Fund, says. "And this is not just in the United States, but I have seen this happening all over the world."

The fund is there "to take chances on ideas even before they have a track record," she says, and in its lifetime the fund has given away \$3.7 million to Boston area initiatives like the Women's Institute for Leadership Development and the Science Club for Girls.

That is why she is helping the organization build its sustainability for the future and doing all she can to get the word out about the fund. In her current position since 2004, Imam has served as a member of the board on a grant committee and as the director of the organization in past stints with the fund. Throughout her career as a feminist-activist, Imam has fought for gender equity and economic opportunities for women in the United States, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.

"I completely don't shy away from describing myself as a feminist," she says, and "perhaps it's because of the way I understand feminism. I have been a feminist ever since I was a child. To me feminism and justice are completely complementary."

She says the essential message of feminism is one of equality and justice for all people and it does not mean that women want to dominate men or other groups. It means that every group has its right to a

full dream, and it should be possible for every group to make that dream a reality.

In addition to being an outspoken feminist, Imam is a devout Muslim who takes the study of the Quran seriously and observes daily prayer. "The spiritual strength that my faith and my practice gives me does help my activism," Imam says. "There is a reason for the activism for me."

She does not get "hung up" on the patriarchal oppression of women that often takes place in Muslim societies because, she says, that is not in line with the real teachings of Islam and it can take place in any society. "I personally see no contradiction [between Islam and feminism]," she says, "because I think that the principles underlying Islam are also about justice and the most basic teachings of Islam are incredibly fair to men and to women."

Originally from Bangladesh, Imam grew up in several different places like Myanmar, Burma, Tunisia and Pakistan because her father, Hassan Imam, was a member of the Pakistan diplomatic corps.

An active campaigner for independence before the partition, the desire for freedom and justice was important to him, and Imam always knew that one of her mother's commitments was that she be fully educated.

Her mother, Jahanara Imam, wanted her to have a certain degree of autonomy in life as a woman, and one incident in particular made a lasting impression on her. Her mother received a letter addressed to "Mrs. Hassan Imam," and "she was so strong and annoyed by that," Imam says. "She said, 'I have my own identity and my own name. How come they are calling me Mrs. So-And-So as if I am a nobody, as if I am just a missus?' I think back on that — 'Wow, this is my mom years ago, long before feminism.'"

When she had the unusual opportunity to attend college in the United States on a scholarship, her parents were supportive and in the mid-60s she came to Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio.

"The kind of professionalism and leadership I saw among the college professors as well as my fellow students really indoctrinated me with the idea that women can do everything, and that was kind of the case for me," she says.

Even today, Imam says she sees that there are degrees of discrimination in all fields and the tremendous burden of home and child still rest primarily on women — even if they work. These are all areas that show injustice and inequity and need to be

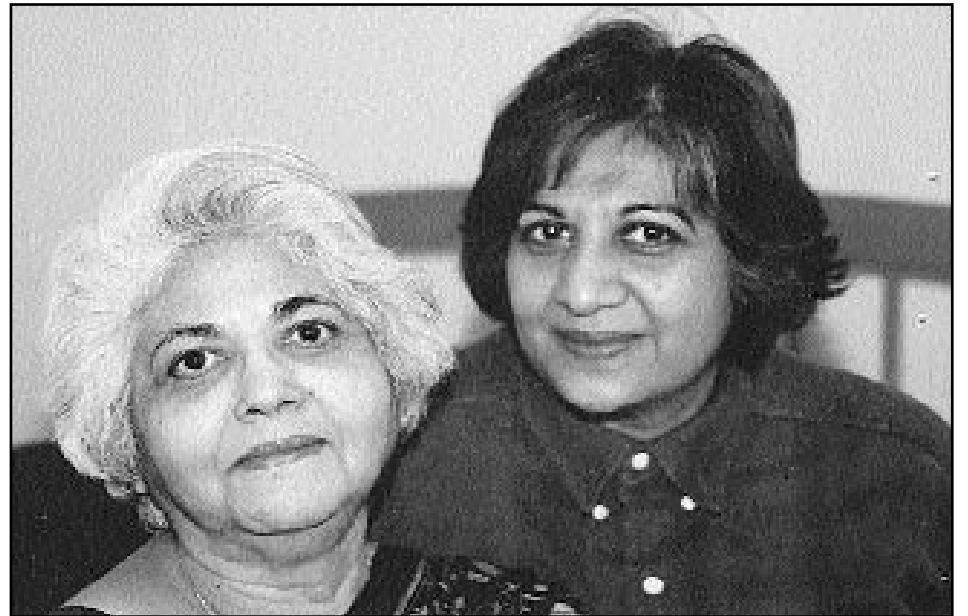


Photo courtesy of HAYAT IMAM

Hayat Imam, director of donor relations for the Boston Women's Fund, says her mother (pictured above) made a lasting impression on her mind.

'I have been a feminist ever since I was a child. To me, feminism and justice are completely complimentary'

**Hayat Imam,
Director of donor relations
Boston Women's Fund**

addressed, she says.

Also, there are the enormous contributions women make to society through their unpaid labor that are never tallied anywhere. She says there are international movements underway to quantitatively analyze this unpaid work that shores up the world's economies, but generally governments and communities do not calculate it.

"When you look at the number of hours of care to elderly, health care to children, child care to children, it's just something that society needs to acknowledge and actually reward, I think," she says.

Imam's other efforts have also been directed towards peace, nuclear disarmament, renewable energy and the negative effects of globalization. She has worked as a consultant for the United Nations Development Program and the U.N. Population Fund in the Philippines and Indonesia. She has been a member of the board of directors of Isis and the Women's Crisis Center in Manila. She is currently active with the Dorchester People for Peace and is co-author of the book "Watermelons Not War — Parenting in the Nuclear Age."

For almost a decade, Imam has worked to implement the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. The convention is shaped by the international community and states can use it to commit themselves to the rights of women. Ironically, the United States is among the nations reluctant to sign on to it.

"I think it is really hard to run the world with only half the wisdom of the human species," Imam says. "Women's voices, their ways of looking at life, their wisdom about their own needs and the needs of the human population, women's views on war and peace are totally critical. And I think that is the thing that is missing in every country of the world."

Imam and her husband, Joseph Hunt, have two grown children, Maya Yasmin, 35, and Taras Hassan, 30. Imam works part-time for the Boston Women's Fund in order to spend time with her first grandchild, Isabel Amina.

Misra plans to open pediatric care collaborative in India

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pediatric endocrinology, Misra's first residency was in obstetrics and gynecology after she earned her medical degree from the Institute of Medical Sciences in Varanasi, India in 1991. It was not until 1996 that she came to the Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, N.Y. to do her residency in pediatrics. A fellowship in pediatrics brought her to Massachusetts General Hospital in 1999, and she earned her master's degree in public health from the Harvard School of Public Health in 2005.

Currently she is an assistant in pediatrics at MGH for Children, assistant in biology at the MGH Neuroendocrine Unit

and assistant professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School.

"She is also a fantastic role model for young women because she is so accomplished in so many different areas, yet she still has the highest commitment to family," Klibanski says.

Misra hopes her research can have a global impact on children's medicine, and she is working to establish a research collaborative with physicians in India. She plans to set up a clinic in India to foster further research and attract more physicians to pediatric endocrinology, which she says is a virtually unknown medical discipline in India. "People there (in India) need to train for this to help other kids that have endocrine problems," she

says. She hopes to set up this collaborative so that she or a colleague will visit India every few months to partner in research and training.

Misra says she is thankful for her parents, Seema and Sachidananda Misra, who always pushed her to do her best, her pediatrician uncle, Sarat Chandra Mishra, who encouraged her to enter pediatric medicine, her husband who has always been supportive, and her son who tells her he is very proud of her.

Misra resides in Chestnut Hill, Mass., with her husband Sidharta, a nephrologist (kidney specialist), and son Sarthak, 13.

Misra says she is thankful for her parents, husband and son for their support.

