


## COMMENT



## ECI Biocommentary: Rakesh Kumar Pilonia

Rakesh Kumar Pilonia <sup>1</sup>✉

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I grew up in a small village in the state of Rajasthan, North–West India and completed my schooling at the village school. I joined Sawai Man Singh Medical College, Jaipur, Rajasthan for my MBBS and I graduated in 2010. Thereafter, I was selected for my post-graduation (MD) in Pediatrics at the Department of Pediatrics, Advanced Pediatrics Center (APC), Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh (2011–2014). I completed my Senior Residency in Pediatrics over the period July 2014–December 2016. During my senior residency, I got interested in the fascinating field of Pediatric Immunology. I completed a 3-year postdoctoral fellowship (DM) in Pediatric Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology at Pediatric Allergy Immunology Unit, APC, PGIMER under the mentorship of Professor Surjit Singh (2017–2019). This is the first and, till date, the only such training course in the subject in India. I am presently working as Assistant Professor in the same department. My areas of research are Kawasaki disease (KD), pediatric lupus and inborn errors of immunity.



Credit: Rakesh Kumar Pilonia

I had the privilege of receiving the ‘Young Investigator Award’ from none other than Dr. Tomisaku Kawasaki himself at the 12th International Kawasaki Disease Symposium, Yokohama, Japan in June 2018 for my work on KD. I have also been awarded the Dr. Satya Gupta Award by the National Academy of Medical Sciences,

New Delhi, India for my work on KD. Recently, my research proposal on genetics of KD has been selected for the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) Research Grant 2022. I have been elected as European Society for Immunodeficiencies Junior Country Representative for India (2018–2022).

I have also received European Society for Immunodeficiencies (ESID) Short Term Fellowship Award in 2019. This enabled me to work as a Fellow at Department of Primary Immunodeficiencies, University Hospital, Leuven, Belgium under the mentorship of Professor Isabelle Meyts. I was also selected for the American College of Rheumatology/Indian Rheumatology Association Fellowship Exchange Programme in 2019. I was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Rheumatology, Hospital for Special Surgery, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, USA under the mentorship of Professor Keren B Onel.

I was a recipient of the European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR) Travel Bursary. This enabled me to participate in 2019 European Congress of Rheumatology, Madrid, Spain. In January 2021, I presented my research at the 58th Annual Conference of Indian Academy of Pediatrics, Mumbai and was conferred the Dr. V. Balagopal Raju Endowment Award and Gold Medal.

The research work being published in this issue pertains to my DM thesis on neutrophil functions in children with lupus under the mentorship of Professor Amit Rawat.<sup>1</sup> We have shown that neutrophil function gets impaired in children with lupus and correlates with disease activity. It is possible that these defects in innate immunity may also be contributing to the high morbidity and mortality of childhood lupus.

I have been fortunate to have worked with many outstanding mentors throughout my training and early in my career. Professor. Surjit Singh, Professor Amit Rawat and Professor Isabelle Meyts have played a role in moulding me and providing guidance and mentorship.

My journey has taught me that hard work, dedication and perseverance are essential pre-requisites for achieving success in the academic and research career. And finally, as a paediatrician, we have to be humble and empathetic towards patients under our care.

## REFERENCE

1. Pilonia R. K. et al. Pediatric systemic lupus erythematosus: phagocytic defect and oxidase activity of neutrophils. *Pediatr. Res.* <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41390-022-02055-2> (2022).

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### COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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