

# PHYSICIAN PROFILE:

# Dr. Prashant Patel

By Fiona Morgan

Photos courtesy of Dr. Prashant Patel

**P**rashant Patel projects his voice and speaks with a friendly but serious expression as he talks about the crisis of obesity, which he considers “the greatest threat to national security.” Nearly two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese. More than 8 percent of Americans have diabetes, and millions

component of our practice.” The center is able to address many needs of diabetic patients that other primary care practices do not, such as managing insulin pumps. He’s proud of his and his partner’s ability to manage even tough cases of patients who are genetically predisposed to diabetes. “We attract high-risk patients, but we

try to do such a good job that we don’t have to refer them” to cardiologists and other specialists.

Patel also spreads the word about obesity and diabetes prevention to community groups, such as the Kiwanis Club and

as the general public; he’s delivered more than 200 talks in six states.

“Medicine will get us only so far,” Patel said, underscoring the message he sends to his audiences, “but the patient will have to shop right, eat right, exercise and stick with the program.”

As he builds his practice in Cary, Patel is also helping to build a voice for Indian-American physicians and other professionals across North Carolina.

When Patel was 2-years-old, he and his family left Gujarat, India, and immigrated to the United States. He grew up in the close-knit Indian-American community of Forest Hills, Queens, where he shared a one-bedroom apartment with his parents, sister, and a continuous stream of relatives newly arrived from India, spending a few days in the Patels’ apartment on the way to a new life. His parents spoke Gujarati

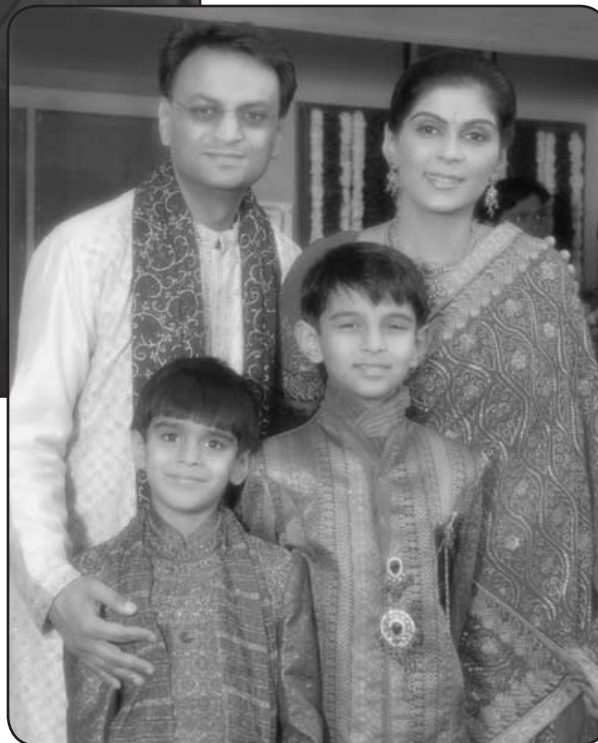
at home; to this day, his mother speaks little English. As a child, he knew that knocking on a few neighbors’ doors could summon enough kids for a game of nine-on-nine baseball in the public park.

The 1970s and early ‘80s in New York were a tense time. Ethnic communities were more segregated than today. Crime was a major problem, and Patel’s father was once mugged on the street. Rumors of “dot-buster” gangs who sought out Indians colored the atmosphere of Patel’s childhood. But his parents didn’t complain, nor did they allow their children to. “We personally never let it get to us,” he said.

It wasn’t the gangs or the muggers that almost caused problems for Patel. It was his own unruly behavior as a young child. *[Continued on page 11]*



Dr. Prashant Patel with his wife Poonam



Dr. Prashant Patel with his wife, Poonam, and their sons, Sahaj (age 11) and Sahil (age 9)

more are pre-diabetic, which put them at great risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Preventing those conditions and managing them once they manifest is Patel’s passion as a physician. “Very few people lose weight and lose it permanently,” he said. “That’s the greatest challenge we face as physicians.”

In 2000, Patel and Dr. Vijay Juneja co-founded Cary Internal Medicine. The private practice serves many members of the Indian-American community, among other patients, in Cary. In 2005 the partners expanded and founded The Diabetes Center, which Patel describes as “a critical

the Rotary, and to the media. He’s been a guest on AM radio call-in shows, and delivered speeches to physicians as well

**BORN:** 1970 in Gujarat, India

**EDUCATION:**

1993, Graduated from the accelerated B.S./M.D. program at Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education at City College of New York  
1995, M.D. from State University of New York – Stony Brook  
1995-1998, Residency, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Iowa City, IA

## Prashant Patel, MD: A Voice for Health

**CAREER HISTORY:**

2000-Present, Founding Partner, Cary Internal Medicine (*caryinternalmedicine.com*) and The Diabetes Center Cary, NC. (*thediabetescenter.net*), Director, The Diabetes Center  
1998-1999, Attending Physician, Dove Internal Medicine/Union Regional Medical Center, Monroe, NC

**HOSPITAL COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:**

2002-2003, Quality Assurance Committee, WakeMed Cary Hospital  
2004-2005, Special Care Committee, WakeMed Cary Hospital

**COMMUNITY:**

2004-2005, Clinical Quality Committee, Key Independent Physicians Association, a 140+ physician organization in Wake County  
2004-2007, Continuing Medical Education Committee, North Carolina Association of Physicians of Indian Origin  
2004-2005, Executive Committee-Member At Large, North Carolina Association of Physicians of Indian Origin  
2005-Present, Leadership Council for Improving Cardiovascular Care  
2005-2006, Leadership Council-American Diabetes Association  
2006-Present, Cardiovascular Advisory Board Member  
2006-2008, Secretary, Triangle Indian-American Physicians Society,  
2009-Present, President, Triangle Indian-American Physicians Society  
2008-Present, North Carolina Indian-American Political Action Committee Executive Committee  
Jan. 14, 2011, Presented to the GOP House

Caucus Health Policy Committee regarding means of reducing healthcare costs for the State of North Carolina  
2009-Present, Guest Member-North Carolina Medical Society-Legislative Cabinet  
2010-Present, Member- State Health Coordinating Council-Gubernatorial Appointment by Governor Beverly Perdue (<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dhsr/ncshcc/>)  
2010-Present, Member- State Health Coordinating Council-  
Quality, Access, Value (QAV) Subcommittee-2010-Present  
Pediatric Operating Room Working Committee-2011-Present

**PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES:**

American College of Physicians  
American Diabetes Association  
American Medical Association  
North Carolina Medical Society

**FAMILY:** Spouse, Poonam Patel, and two sons, Sahaj Patel, age 11, and Sahil Patel, age 9

**FAVORITE LEISURE ACTIVITIES:**

Reading and playing with my kids.

**FAVORITE BOOK:** *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by

Doris Kearns Goodwin

**FAVORITE FILM:** A Beautiful Mind because it's about the human spirit overcoming challenges beyond ones' control

**LIKES ABOUT THE TRIANGLE:** It's family oriented, and the people here value education as well as the arts such as Broadway shows, the NC Symphony, and NC Museum of Art.

**DISLIKES ABOUT THE TRIANGLE:** I grew up in NYC and I haven't been able to find my childhood favorite foods: falafels and real New York-style pizza with green pepper and onions. That's probably best, though.

**ADVICE TO YOUNG PHYSICIANS**

**STARTING PRACTICE:** Get involved in shaping state and national health care policy and be a strong patient advocate while providing quality medical care.

**WISHES THE PUBLIC UNDERSTOOD**

**ABOUT MEDICINE:** The greatest threat to national security is the obesity epidemic. Also, medicine is effective only with a patient's active involvement.

"In elementary school, bad behavior almost got the best of me." Disruptive in class, unable or unwilling to participate in learning, the young Patel was headed down the wrong path. "Nobody thought I would be a success," he recalled. He credits his parents' discipline with steering him back on course.

He loved math and science, and his parents encouraged him to excel in school. Patel decided he wanted to become a doctor. "The field of medicine is a noble field," he said. "It involves not only mastery in the sciences but fairly good appreciation of the human mind or psyche. I also wanted the economic freedom to support my immediate family and extended community."

Patel's father had briefly attended medical school in India but decided to leave after severe hazing in school. He pursued a master's degree in organic chemistry instead, without his father's support, and had to tutor high school students in order to pay his way. In the U.S., he worked as a medical technologist. Patel's mother worked as a cashier.

Now their son was faced with a decision between Cornell University, with its \$35,000 annual tuition, and attending City College, part of New York City's public university system, at an annual cost of \$1,250.

"My parents were very supportive," Patel says. "My father said, 'You go to whatever college you want. I will work two full-time jobs if necessary.' While my mother had very little education and married very young, she worked menial jobs just to contribute to my educational expenses. I remember being so happy when she stopped working once I graduated medical school."

He decided on an accelerated seven-year medical program at the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education at City College. It offered an integrated baccalaureate education with preclinical education. Patel completed the first two years of medical school as part of the undergraduate program and the last two at Stony Brook Medical School in Long Island. He went on to complete an internal medicine residency program at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, Iowa.

"For me, internal medicine provided a vast opportunity to see patients with a wide variety of afflictions, from the realm of mild ailments to terminal ones. I love what I do and I love helping people. Medicine also requires a commitment to a lifelong journey of learning. After all, it is a diverse and fluid field."

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**NIETZSCHE:** *continued from page 13*

religious expression (mystics like Hildegard of Bingen excluded) to one that increasingly emphasized an identified composer and more secular modes of self-expression. The style of music morphed in tandem with the accelerating pace of socio-cultural change. As a result some 21st century critics of hard rock (heavy and/or death metal) suggest that the composer and lyricist are dying in popular culture. Yet according to my 25 year-old son there are widespread efforts to fuse Medieval, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner and Bluegrass with metal. These steps are redefining not eliminating the composer as we know him/her. We are also seeing the dissolution/redefinition of the self in these synergetic art forms.

In literature, Shakespeare used poetic drama while later novelists like Virginia Wolff, William Faulkner, Latin American magical realists and modern poets struggled to capture and convey individual experiences through evocative lyricism or metaphors. Although writers grapple with troubling emotions, metaphysics and spiritualism, few would confuse the Faulkner's **Sound and Fury** or TS Eliot's **The Wasteland**, or Shakespeare's **King Lear** with theological or philosophical treatises. These authors grappled with the limitations of language, plot and story-telling, the unpredictability of reality and the inner dialog or streaming of thought and perceptions. Applying Nietzsche's hypotheses we witnessed a collision between Apollonian order- Dionysian sensuality and the inherent limitations of printed language.

For us the pace of technological and socio-cultural change plays out in music, literature, dance and the visual arts. But the arts do not occur in a vacuum. The tension described by Nietzsche and Greenberg is in constant flux and creates a sense of emotional uncertainty and social dissonance. Using this formula, our next series of article explore the contraction of artistic tastes due in response to changing ideas about self-expression. §

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Being elected a Fellow of the American College of Physicians in 2009 was a major accomplishment for Patel. He has also served on the Clinical Quality Committee of the Key Independent Physicians Association, an organization of more than 140 physicians who promote quality assurance initiatives. Patel and Juneja were the first physicians in Wake County to be recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

In 2006, Patel joined other physicians in establishing the Triangle Indian-American Physician's Society. "I realized that 15 to 20 percent of doctors in the United States are of Indian descent," but they make up only 1 percent of the population. "We should give back," he said. TIPS hosts Continuing Medical Education (CME) as a means of "establishing a professional collaboration between physicians of various backgrounds and fostering relationships with medical societies to bring

the best of medical attention to Triangle citizens," Patel said. TIPS member physicians also serve patients at annual health fairs.

Two years later, he expanded his efforts to build a voice for Indian-Americans in the state. He is a founding executive member of the North Carolina Indian-American Political Action Committee, which raises money for candidates of both political parties. The group hosted the first ever Indian-American Day at the state capitol in Raleigh in 2009, drawing state legislators, Governor Bev Perdue, and members of the Council of State. Later that year, Patel joined a group of nine doctors who flew to Washington, D.C. to discuss Medicare reimbursement formula, tort reform and other policy issues with North Carolina's representatives in Congress.

In 2010, Governor Perdue appointed Patel to the State Health Coordinating Council, a body that serves the N.C.

Department of Health and Human Services by directing the development of the annual State Medical Facilities Plan. In January of this year, Patel spoke before the GOP House Caucus Health Policy Committee about ways to reduce healthcare costs for the state. He is currently also a member of the Legislative Cabinet of the North Carolina Medical Society.

Given his growing involvement in health care policy, it's fair to ask whether Patel would consider a run for office himself. He quickly answers, "No. I can work on shaping policy, but I love to come to the office to see patients. This is a dream job."

At home, Patel and his wife Poonam are focused on their two sons, Sahaj, age 11, and Sahil, age 9. Above all, he wants them to build a strong educational foundation. "In the U.S.," he said, "if you're educated, you're going to get a fair shot." §

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