



<http://www.mymultiplesclerosis.co.uk/misc/akritjaswal.html>

### **Akrit Jaswal The Seven Year Old Surgeon**

#### **Akrit Pran Jaswal, India's Child Surgeon - Child Genius**

A young girl in India badly burned as a toddler, her fingers had fused together and curled into a knotted ball. Her shepherd family could not afford surgery, but they had heard of a remarkable young boy being called the child surgeon. Akrit Jaswal was only seven years old when he operated, successfully, on the eight year old girl to release her fingers.

Akrit Jaswal had a reputation, in the region, for being a medical genius. He has been shown to have the highest I.Q. of any boy his age in India, a country of over one billion people. He has focussed this phenomenal intelligence on medicine and now, at the age of twelve, claims to be on the verge of discovering a cure for cancer.

An early developer, Akrit was walking and talking by the time he was 10 months old. He was reading and writing by two, and reading Shakespeare, in English, by the time he was five, and is now talking about his theories for oral gene therapy in the fight against cancer. He is studying for a science degree at Chandigarh College and, at twelve years of age, is the youngest student ever accepted by an Indian University. Akrit's father left the family a year ago, depressed and exhausted by six years battling with Indian bureaucracy to get his son's intellect acknowledged and resources made available for his cancer research.

Is it possible that this young boy knows something the medical profession does not? Throughout history, scientific breakthroughs have come not only from the established, the learned, and the scholarly, but also from single flashes of insight and inspiration.

Akrit is not phased by his fame and is used to meeting government ministers and press representatives. For ordinary people meeting Akrit, it is very different. When he is in town, they gather for an audience. They come with prescriptions and medicines, seeking advice. They come with ailments and injuries for a diagnosis. They come to see a doctor, a healer. They come to see a guru, and because this is India, there is always spiritual dimension.

Akrit may be famous but, will he be the one to unlock the secrets to a cure for cancer. He was invited to Imperial College, London to find out. He will spend two weeks based at Imperial College having his intelligence tested and talking super-mechanisms, genes and therapies with scientists at the cutting-edge of cancer research.



Mr Anup Patel and Professor Mustafa Djamgoz

Akrit must convince Professor Mustafa Djamgoz, a world-renowned research biologist, and his colleague Mr Anup Patel, a consultant urological surgeon, that his ideas are realistic and worth pursuing.

The inquisitors become his friends, Mr Patel and Professor Djamgoz are keen to foster Akrit's enthusiasm, keen to protect him from disappointment, and willing to guide him on his way. Professor Djamgoz says of Akrit: " He is generating ideas based upon what he knows, in an idealistic sort of way, without being in full grip of reality, without knowing how difficult it is to turn the ideas into practical realities".

Just how intelligent is Akrit? Team Focus, the UK's leading I.Q. analysts agree to test him. For Akrit this was to prove a disappointment. His exceptional results in verbal and numeracy tests were countered by poor practical tests, particularly in the area of pattern matching. Because of this wide range of results Team Focus chose not to give him a final rating.

Rosemary Facer, a childhood psychologist, put forward the theory that Akrit had been an early developer accounting for the good results and because of this early genius he had missed out on later schooling accounting for the poor practical results. These results do not affect what Akrit may achieve, but he needs help, a wise friend to talk to.

The Professor's analysis is that Akrit needs to obsess less and enjoy more. He thinks Akrit shows great potential but it needs to be properly guided.

Akrit returns home to India, slightly maturer, a little more realistic, but this precocious young man is still convinced that he will find a cure for cancer.

**Indiantelevision.com's News Headlines**  
**Discovery introduces viewers to a seven year old surgeon**

**Indiantelevision.com Team**  
(5 June 2006 6:00 pm)

MUMBAI: Discovery will air a one hour special The Seven Year Old Surgeon on 10 June at 8 pm

In 2001 seven year old Akrit Jaswal gained celebrity status when he successfully performed an operation to separate the fused fingers of an eight year old girl in his show

Now the 12 year old researches cures for cancer in his laboratory which was established by his proud parents. Viewers will also see him going to the UK to meet British scientists who offer their verdicts on him. The show also interviews psychologists who assess the effects these achievements could be having on his childhood.

Jaswal became obsessed with medicine at an early age. He memorised medical books and witnessed surgeries. He even experimented on animals at his home in Himachal Pradesh. As the word of the young prodigy spread villagers flocked to his home seeking advice or just a glimpse of the boy.

Much to his discomfort he was idolised and revered as a God. However he did meet some of the hordes that gathered on his doorstep. He has prescribed medicine for over a thousand cases including a man suffering from a brain disorder.

**The Seven Year-Old Surgeon**  
**Article dated June 2006**  
**Author(s): The Sunday Times**

**An Extract from the preview of the programme (The Times Dec 04, 2005):**  
**My cure for cancer, by the boy genius**

The 'medical Mozart' is sublimely confident of his breakthrough, he tells Cosmo Landesman Akrit Jaswal is a young Indian who has been called "the world's smartest boy" and it's easy to see why. His IQ is 146.

He began to read Shakespeare at the age of four. He was seven years old when he carried out his first medical procedure and now at the ripe old age of 12 he tells me: "I have discovered a cure for cancer." In his home village in Himachal Pradesh, northern India, Akrit is treated like a god. The local children know him as "the genius". Adults come to him to discuss their ailments and prescriptions. He is a prodigy who has been touted in America and sold to the media as a Mozart of modern medicine. But Akrit has his critics and plenty of people are sceptical about the claims made on his behalf. Some say he is just a very bright boy with an exceptional memory but no real gift for science. Others claim he is the victim of pushy parents who stole his childhood.

In person Akrit doesn't look like your typical boy genius. He doesn't have the big goggles, the jacket with a row of Biro's in the top pocket and the boy-wonder bow tie. He has the typical jeans-and-trainers look of a 12-year-old. He is anxious to present himself as just an ordinary boy, but one with an extraordinary brain. "I'm just like any other kid, except when it comes to talking about science." He even boasts he's no "bookworm" or a "boffin". "No, I don't spend all my time reading and studying," he tells me. "I was given a copy of Stephen Hawking's book, but I've never read it."

Akrit came to public attention when in 2000 he performed his first medical procedure at his family home. He was seven. His patient — a local girl who could not afford a doctor — was eight. Her hand had been burnt in a fire, causing her fingers to close into a tight fist that wouldn't open. Akrit had no formal medical training and no experience of surgery, yet he managed to free her fingers. For the first time in five years she was able to use her hand.

I ask him how he managed to carry out the procedure; wasn't he nervous? "No, I wasn't. I have read many medical books and attended many operations. I think I did a better job than most surgeons. They would have opted for plastic surgery, but I didn't need to."

The fact that carrying out such a procedure is illegal doesn't worry him. "Yes, it was illegal. But it does no harm. It's good for mankind. So what if it goes against dead old medical ethics?" Akrit's interest in science began at the age of four. "It was then that I read Gray's Anatomy and books on chemistry. I studied physics up to A-level standard. I was fascinated by science because it could answer all the questions I had about life — how we got here and why we are here. But now I'm older I have to find new answers."

One answer he is confident of finding is a cure for cancer. It's this claim that has brought him worldwide media attention, admiration . . . and derision.

So how does a 12-year-old with no medical training and no lab experience discover a cure for cancer? "I actually made my discovery when I was eight. I did it by reading books on cancer and getting information from the internet. My cure aims at the modification of malformed genes that cause cancer and their successful repair either by the activation of enzymes or direct modification of genotoxic drugs."

Is this boy deluded? A victim of his parents' high expectations? Common sense tells us that 12-year-old boys do not cure cancer, but our belief in the power of the child prodigy makes us wonder: maybe it is possible.

Akrit recently visited London to participate in a forthcoming television documentary about his life (to be shown on Five in January). While here he achieved his dream of trying out his ideas for curing cancer on researchers at Imperial College.

Professor Mustafa Djamgoz, who spent a number of weeks with the boy, told me: "There's no doubt he is a brilliant boy. He really knows his stuff and has put his heart, soul and mind into finding a cure for cancer. But his solution is not that novel. In theory it could work, but it would be premature to say he has found a cure."

Society is ambiguous in its attitude to child prodigies such as Akrit. We admire them, envy them, would like our own children to have their gifts — yet we also want to believe those who are blessed are also cursed with all sorts of emotional and psychological problems. But Akrit refuses to play the victim and is annoyed by reports he was never allowed a normal childhood. "Oh come on," he says with weary resignation. "I had plenty of friends to play with when I was a child and, yes, I had nursery rhymes too."

"Don't you feel your parents put too much pressure on you to succeed?" I ask. "No, I never feel that. My parents never put pressure on me. In fact they're the ones who are always saying you should rest and chill out." I suspect this is not the case. Akrit has long been under considerable pressure to succeed, especially by his father. When Akrit was eight his father resigned from his job as an economics adviser in Delhi so he could devote himself to his son's talents. He moved the family back to their home village and set up a school for his son so his talents could be nurtured. He began a crusade to get the boy into a medical school when he was eight, but no Indian school would accept anyone under 17.

Akrit's father and mother have since separated. She says it was the frustration of not getting the boy into medical school that destroyed the marriage. Before he left, Akrit's father said: "Call me when you cure cancer." The boy has not seen him for more than a year.

At present, Akrit is attending university where he is doing a BSc undergraduate course in medicine. It can't be easy being the only 12-year-old there. The question that hangs over the boy's head is this — will he ever be able to live up to everyone's expectations? What happens if his ideas do not in fact cure cancer? "I will be embarrassed, but I will never give up trying," he says.

Talking to him you get the impression that the most intense pressure to succeed comes from within. Although there's no doubting he is a very gifted boy, such children do not usually go on to do great things when they grow up. Linda Silverman, of the Gifted Development Centre in America, who examined Akrit when he was eight, makes the point that "most gifted people do not seek or achieve fame".

That's certainly true of recent British prodigies. Remember Ruth Lawrence who, at the age of 12, went to Oxford to study mathematics? Today she lives in Israel as an Orthodox Jew. And the ones who go on to succeed can often turn out pretty weird (Bobby Fischer) or die prematurely (Mozart). Only time will tell if Akrit has been blessed or cursed.

**A born genius**  
**By Chris | Permalink**

Watched a fascinating documentary last night called The Seven Year Old Surgeon, about an Indian boy called Akrit Jaswal, who's actually 12 years old now but has an incredible brain and personality.

He comes from a village in the north of India and was reading Shakespeare in English when he was five. Then with encouragement from his family started reading medical books. When he was seven he performed an operation on the hand of a girl and his fame began to take off in India.

By the time he was ten he was teaching maths and science to students twice his age and is the youngest person ever to go to university in India. He's made it his life's mission to find a cure for cancer and the programme last night brought him to Imperial College in London to meet Mustafa Diamgoz and Anup Patel, two of the UK's leading cancer research experts.

To hear this kid speak is amazing. He not only knows incredibly complex medical topics and terminology but knows how to use them and can argue his case with people with decades more experience. During their first meeting at Imperial College Mustafa Diamgoz turn's to the cameraman and says 'I hope you're filming this' as Jaswal details how he'd go about finding a cancer cure.

There was a funny sequence when Arup Patel took him and a group of mid-20's medical students to look at some patients and the kid answered every question on the diagnosis and treatment of the old man they where looking at.

Afterwards the med students who'd been looking on like they couldn't believe what they were hearing said he was a lot further ahead in his knowledge than they were. This programme is definitely worth watching if its repeated, if just to see how some people are lucky enough to have brains that simply soak up information.

**TV and Radio**  
**The Times      March 21, 2006**

**Times2**  
**Your life in his very young hands**  
**LAST NIGHT'S TV BY JOE JOSEPH**

Did you, too, quickly double-check the TV listings to see if maybe the scheduled programme on Five had been switched at the last moment for an episode of You've Been Framed? The programme that was broadcast began with a home video of an operation carried out in a rural village in India at the foothills of the Himalayas on an eight-year-old girl. The operation was being carried out by a seven-year-old boy. This boy had picked up his surgical techniques from the Colour Atlas of Surgery. It's a book containing descriptions of 57 surgical procedures.

The boy takes a scalpel and begins separating the fingers on the girl's hand, the fist having fused into a ball after she burnt it as a toddler. This is the point at which you might have gone to re-check the television listings, while simultaneously screaming, "Someone stop him! He's seven, for Pete's sake! He's not old enough to be trusted with his own doorkey, let alone to perform keyhole surgery!" It looked as if you were watching a home video of a boy who has just received a doctor's kit for his birthday and goes slightly overboard on the Dr Kildare routine, while his parents brim in the background with pride and amusement at the cuteness of kids.

But no. The reason this girl's poor parents took her to this mini-surgeon was because, by the age of 7, Akrit Jaswal had already garnered a reputation as a handy surgeon and as a boy genius, apparently

laying claim to the highest IQ of any boy his age in India. Akrit Jaswal is now 12, and his horizons have moved far beyond hand surgery. He is on the brink, he tells us in **The Seven-Year-Old Surgeon: Extraordinary People** (Five), of discovering a cure for cancer.

"My basic concept for cancer treatment is oral gene therapy," he tells us, "and I think if I'm provided with a lab, within two or three years I will be able to develop a chemical drug that will be able to modify the human genome and replace the defective genes with normal ones." He talks like a shopper stuck at the end of a long queue at a supermarket checkout, to whom it is obvious that the solution to everyone's rising temper is to just open another till or two.

But curing cancer is not quite as simple as opening another supermarket checkout (unless, of course, the people who supervise the opening of more checkout tills in response to swelling shopper demand in certain supermarkets are the same people charged with finding a cure for cancer; which might explain a lot about why a cure remains so elusive). Akrit finds this out when he visits Imperial College in London and all but reprimands cancer experts with decades' worth of research and surgical experience under their belts for not having nailed the disease.

With enviable self-restraint, these experts don't destroy Akrit's self-regard, but manage to inject a sense of practical reality into this remarkable boy without puncturing his ambition.

And he does have ambition. Akrit has three main aims. "The first is that I can develop the cure of cancer and Aids and cure each and every man suffering with these diseases throughout the world. Second, to get the Nobel prize at the youngest age for ever [sic]. Number three is that I will conduct research and I pray that I shall be successful in curing each and every human disease. That is my third wish. Nothing else." It is a humbling checklist for those of us whose ambitions now shamefully stretch to remembering to collect the dry cleaning before the cleaners exercise their right to dispose of all items not collected within three months. Let's hope that Akrit finds those cures for every human disease. But you keep being haunted by the words of Aldous Huxley, who noted that we are all geniuses up to the age of 10.

You could tell Andrew Davies had fun writing **The Chatterley Affair** (BBC Four). Davies explores the way the 1960 obscenity trial of Penguin Books for publishing D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* maybe marked a moment when an emotionally corseted postwar Britain tilted a little on its axis and tipped towards a more free-spirited age, by confecting two jurors (winningly played by Louise Delamere as a sultry middle-class divorcée and Rafe Spall as her working-class Mellors) whose fictional jury-room affair echoes the passion of Lawrence's lovers.

It's a cute conceit; but also cutely paradoxical to see a drama about the Chatterley controversy containing scenes more sexually explicit than those in Lawrence's novel. Like hiring Donald Trump to explain why people rejoiced when Bobby Charlton abandoned his ludicrous combover.

**Sunday March 26, 2006**  
**The Observer**  
**The Family Man BBC1**  
**Jimmy's Farm BBC2 The Seven Year Old Surgeon FIVE**

'Everybody should have babies!' exclaimed Trevor Eve's charismatic IVF guru, Patrick Stowe, during a gathering of 'his' parents and their offspring in BBC1's three-parter *The Family Man*, a zeitgeisty piece of drama from Tony Marchant. Mind you, if TV writers habitually drove white vans advertising their wares, on the side of his Marchant would probably have written 'Reliably Zeitgeisty Plots for Sale'.

Anyway, clearly everyone shouldn't have babies, but you knew what Stowe meant. In these rampantly consumerist times it's all about having the 'right' to make the choice to have a baby ... and, increasingly, a particular sort of baby.

As if procreation were all about instant gratification, about walking into Selfridges and trying to decide which one of this season's overpriced must-have handbags is the one for you, and then - booooooring! - finding you have to join a waiting list.

And as *The Family Man* has already made abundantly clear, unless you're still procreating in an old-fashioned random lo-tech sort of way, not only are the choices increasingly mind-bending, they are also ideal for exploration - or even exploitation - in an issues-by-numbers primetime TV drama. Marchant gives us four similarly desperate couples with wildly differing circumstances: Gillian (Michelle Collins) has left it too late at 41 but wants kids with her 33-year-old partner Steve (Peter McDonald: 'Forty is the new 30, but somebody forgot to tell your eggs ... '), so she finds a girl who decides she'd rather not pay off her student loan by pole-dancing, but with some well-remunerated, albeit illegal, egg donation. A decision all parties will regret, given that by the end of the first episode the brazen egg-laden little hussy, Kelly, was inviting Steve into her flat for what looked like the sort of non-clinical fertilisation practice session of which Gillian may not approve.

Meanwhile Jane and Paul (Sara Powell and the never less than excellent Lennie James) already had three healthy daughters but their toddler son had died in a car accident, so they wanted another boy; infertile Gary and his partner, mum-of-one Tina (Katy Cavanagh and Lee Ross) wanted a baby they could call their own, while, after numerous attempts at IVF, Nathalie and Matthew (Claire Skinner and Dominic Rowan) were prepared to get pregnant by any means necessary, even if that meant stuffing Nathalie with too many fertilised eggs.

For Stowe, meanwhile, a day at work apparently came as a bit of light relief from his own domestic woes as a divorced workaholic dad with a pair of angry and resentful teenagers under his roof. Cue slightly heavy-handed dramatic irony of the 'he may be able to make babies but he's a rubbish parent' variety.

Everything that can go wrong is bound to go wrong over the next couple of episodes - inevitable when, as Stowe has already observed, 'It's about giving couples more choice!' In the past, when a couple were told they couldn't have children, presumably they either went home and had a good, snotty old cry before signing up for evening classes and a trip to Battersea Dogs' Home, or they set about trying to adopt.

Now, however, being given more choice not only makes life more exhausting, but if one still, even after all those choices, fails to get whatever it is one is after, it's easy to end up feeling like a monumental failure - to the power of one hundred, presumably, when we're talking about fertility, a subject so emotive that it's perfectly possible for all parties to forget that none of us have any procreative 'rights', per se, and that making babies is always a lottery - and, most bafflingly, that just because you've got the money doesn't mean you get to buy the goods.

Anyway *The Family Man* is a classy and engaging drama with excellent central performances, and manages to indulge its star in a meaty part without ever coming across as a Trevor Eve vehicle.

And it's very good on the cutting-edge issues, too. For example, I didn't know about egg-sharing (reduced IVF costs for women with healthy eggs who are still, for whatever reason, unable to conceive - if they are prepared to share their eggs with other women), or the particular dangers of multiple births, or how IVF clinics regularly deal with clients demanding (illegal) sex selection, and how, market forces being what they are, some of them probably cave in ...

Yup, it's an ethical skidpan all right. And of course in the middle of a major skid the very worst thing a driver can do is slam on the brakes, so it's my guess that *The Family Man* will raise many more questions than it manages to answer, albeit entertainingly.

No room for procreative sentimentality in the last episode of the current run of *Jimmy's Farm* (BBC2), in which the bottom line, and debts of 95K, ensured that if a 'fat sleepy boar with no lead in his pencil' failed to keep the sows in-pig, then even Jimmy, a pretty soft touch by all accounts, could be roused to radical action.

'At the end of the day we're not a zoo, are we? Put him in the Yellow Pages.'

Soon the boar put up for adoption was followed out of the gate by a favourite old sow called Ethel, sacrificed for chops, while the ex-battery chickens - lousy layers purchased for 50p each - were, unless they bucked up their ideas a bit, living happy free-range lives on borrowed time.

Elsewhere, Jimmy searched for new, and not necessarily porcine-related, revenue streams, including foraging for fungi in the woods (abruptly curtailed after Jimmy's long-suffering girlfriend Michaela was hospitalised with an allergic reaction) and musing on a potentially tourist-seducing concept entitled *Guinea Pig Island*. 'I think we're pretty much made if we do that,' muttered an underwhelmed Michaela, eyebrow raised and oozing veritable sausages of sarcasm.

In the end 45K of debt was paid off in three months, and by more traditional means - flogging Christmas chipolatas 'with chestnuts, cranberries and fruit peel', doubtless for a premium, at London's posher farmer's markets and the Earls Court Good Food Show, while even the lousy layers came good.

I think it's fair to say that, despite the undoubted commercial benefits of a Jamie Oliver endorsement and your own TV series, Jimmy is still a pretty rubbish businessman, but his travails make for charming and, in its unabashed lack of brashness, almost timeless telly. We could do with a little more of that.

Charming isn't a critical adjective I often have cause to deploy but it accurately describes Five's Extraordinary People: The Seven Year Old Surgeon, too. Despite suffering a bit of an identity crisis (it might just as easily have been called, slightly less catchily and alliteratively, 'The 12 Year Old Oncologist', while the title on my DVD, 'The World's Smartest Boy', was presumably a bit of wishful thinking) the film was infinitely sweeter, less sensationalist and more thought-provoking than first appeared.

Indian child medical prodigy Akrit Jaswal performed his first operation at seven and by the age of 12 was studying for a medical degree, while seeking cures for both cancer and Aids. He duly came to the attention of leading London-based oncologists - or, as was more likely the case, brought to their attention by the film-makers - and invited to visit Imperial College.

Fully and cynically expecting a story of third world hucksterism and blind faith, my expectations were first confounded when British medical students admitted on camera that he was way ahead of their game, and Akrit started arguing with research biologist Professor Mustafa Djangoz about the best way to treat cancers: 'I'm sorry but I don't agree! I think surgery increases its metastatic rate ...' Soon we were watching the boy surgeon deftly tying practice sutures and trotting out incomprehensible stuff received with knowing nods and smiles from professors and consultants.

Indeed, so fond were the fatherly smiles of his new mentors that at one point I thought smitten consultant oncologist Anup Patel was going to insist on adopting him. Because the downside of this uplifting tale was that Akrit no longer saw his father - who, unable to cope with the pressures of raising a prodigy, had left the family and, heartbreakingly, told his son that he would see him again only when Akrit had found his cures.

Discussion of Dad was, unsurprisingly, the only time Akrit stopped looking and sounding like some sort of stunted, show-pony Einstein manqu., and looked a lot like a sweet little lad who missed his dad. Further proof, were it needed, that not everybody should have babies - even though you wouldn't put it past young Akrit, should he put his mind to it, to find a way for everybody to do precisely that.