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The post of director general of that fell vacant after the retirement of Dr VM Katoch (in March, 2015), has finally been filled up. Government has appointed Dr Soumya Swaminathan as director general, ICMR and secretary, Department of Health Research (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare) with effect from August 17, 2015. Her appointment is for the three years until further orders, mentioned the official circular.

She brings with her, the vast experience in health research and research administration. Prior to this assignment, Dr Soumya Swaminathan was director, National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) in Chennai since 2012. She also happens to be the daughter of famous scientist and father of India green revolution, Dr M S Swaminathan. She herself is a renowned figure in the field of medicine.

After completing her MBBS from AFMC, Pune and MD in Pediatrics from AIIMS, New Delhi, further training included a Fellowship in Neonatology and Pediatric Pulmonology at the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, University of Southern California, USA and a Research Fellowship in the Dept. of Pediatric Respiratory Diseases, University of Leicester, UK. She joined the Tuberculosis Research Centre, Chennai in 1992 and has spent the past 23 years in health research. Her research interests include pediatric and adult tuberculosis, epidemiology and pathogenesis, the role of nutrition and HIV-associated TB.

She also served for 2 years as Coordinator, Neglected Tropical Diseases at TDR. She holds many professional memberships such as International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (Chair, HIV Section 2009-11); Member, International Scientific Advisory Expert Group for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Tuberculosis (APPG TB), UK; and Member, Third World Organization of Women Scientists. She also serves as a Member, UNAIDS Expert Panel and Member, Scientific and Technical Advisory Group, WHO Stop TB department.

In addition, she serves on many national committees of the health ministry, DBT, DST and national institutes like AIIMS and Indian Institute of Science. She has the distinction of being awarded the President's Gold Medal at the undergraduate level for the best all round outgoing student of the year 1980. She was awarded ICMR Kshanika oration award by ICMR in 2008, Tamil Nadu Science and technology award in 2012 and is a Fellow of three of India's science academies.

Through DHR and the network of ICMR institutes, Dr Swaminathan looks forward to focusing on key health priorities and generating scientific evidence for achieving public health impact. Further, she will work towards expanding the scope and quality of biomedical research being conducted in our medical colleges.