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CHAMPIONS of INDIA'S GROWTH



Pankaj Lidoo



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From Survivor to Institution Builder

Building a Healthcare Legacy for Women

What began with a childhood fight for survival became a lifelong commitment to healthcare, education and social impact. Today, Dr. Pooja Sidharth Rao is building institutions that empower women, strengthen medical professionals and create lasting change.



Dr. Pooja S Rao
Co-Founder & Executive Director
Medline Academics
Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals

At the age of eight, Dr. Pooja Sidharth Rao underwent open-heart surgery in circumstances where the odds of survival were extremely slim. She came through it, and the experience left her with a conviction that has since defined her career: access to good healthcare should never be left to chance. That conviction now runs an entire ecosystem.

Dr. Pooja co-founded Medline Academics in 2020 alongside Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Kamini A. Rao, building one of India's first e-learning platforms dedicated entirely to reproductive medicine. She shares, "Medline Academics was conceived to transform healthcare education through innovative, accessible online learning."

This platform now trains over 300 reproductive medicine specialists every year. The platform did not simply digitise existing curricula; it built a mentorship-led pathway for fertility specialists in a country where such training was scarce outside a handful of metros.

The academy proved to be a foundation rather than a destination. Dr. Pooja went on to open Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals, a women's health centre she describes in her own words,

"Our hospitals care for women from menarche to menopause and beyond."

Alongside the hospitals sits Poorvi Digisart, a healthcare branding and events agency behind major healthcare launches including Cytecure Hospital's Bengaluru debut before more than 3,000 guests. Her production arm has directed the Baby Gala, an IVF success celebration drawing 1,500 attendees, and steered the LIFE Conference—a leading series of conferences in the field of reproductive medicine, organized in India—for over a decade.

The philanthropic layer runs just as deep. As Managing Trustee of the Kamini Kares Foundation, Rao has personally supported the education of more than 500 children with limited access to educational opportunities, funded postgraduate studies for select students, and set up computer laboratories in low-income schools to narrow the digital divide. Rural reproductive health camps and free ART consultations round out a portfolio built as much around access as around ambition.

The recognition has followed at a pace few entrepreneurs experience within a span of two years. Dr. Pooja S Rao was named a Padma Shri Samman awardee in 2026, and 2025 alone brought her the Rashtriya Bharat Ratna Sammaan and the Rashtriya Shaurya Samman, alongside a Doctorate in Healthcare conferred by the Honorary Doctorate Award Council. This year has added the Udyog Yogdaan Puraskar for excellence in reproductive medicine and healthcare innovation and the National Excellence Council's Karnataka Excellence Award for healthcare education leadership, on top of a place on India Today's Independence Day She List and a feature in Fortune India's roll call of the leaders it calls the engines of Viksit Bharat.

For Dr. Pooja S Rao, the throughline from a children's ward decades ago to a hospital chain today is simple: institutions built with empathy outlast the people who founded them, and that, more than any award, is the legacy she is working toward.