

The rapport of a doctor with his patient - Is it at its nadir?

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Commentary

India is the seventh largest country as per the geographical area, and is the 2nd most populous country after China. Since independence in 1947, there is development in every field in India and so is in the health sector. Health care is an important aspect for every country and health is a basic right of all human being (Alma Ata Declaration, 1978).^(1,2) Health infrastructure can be described as back bone of a nation because an unhealthy nation faces a lot of trouble especially financially. Medicine is considered to be a noble profession since ages. Many of times doctors are described 'After God', but scenario is changing now. Unfortunately rapport or relationship between doctor and a patient is degrading.⁽³⁾ There are strings of episode of violence or assaults on doctors by patients or their attendants, that are evident in recent past on frequent basis and condition is deteriorating day by day.⁽⁴⁾ There must be a systematic work-up to rule out various reasons behind attacks on doctors and diminishing rapport between two.

India has boosted its health care delivery system in last couple of decades from Primary Health Centers (PHC's) to Tertiary Health Centers, there is a substantial growth. Currently, India has 25020 PHCs, 5363 Community Health Centers, 398 Medical Colleges and 305 Dental Colleges as on 2014.⁽⁵⁾ Despite these growths in health sector, India still lags far behind as far as doctor patient ratio is concerned, in comparison to healthy nations like USA. Significant gap occurs between the demand for healthcare workforce and the actual supply — India has only 0.7 doctors per 1,000 patients in comparison to WHO stipulated minimum doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:1,000. The hospital bed density in India is 0.9 per 1,000 persons,⁽⁶⁾ which is pretty much short of WHO guidelines of 3.5 per 1,000 patients. This is a pathetic situation. Main reason behind fewer doctors per 1000 population is ignorance of health sector by government agencies and policy makers. Public funding of health sector in India remains merely at 1.2 percent of GDP,⁽⁷⁾ with central Government spending constituting a third of overall government funds. It is much lower than USA that spends around 18% of total GDP on health. Even many of countries of Sub Sahara region spend more on health than India.

These statistics are self-sufficient to describe the mediocrity of health sector and the burden on doctors in

country. Doctors are forced to work relentlessly in government set-ups. This leads to decreased counseling time and quality interaction with the service recipients. As most of patients used to consult public hospitals, pity working conditions often lead to some sort of arguments leading to deterioration of working atmosphere with physical injuries constituting a major part. There is also paucity of security staffs in most of hospitals which is not sufficient enough to control chaos or any casualties.

Another reason for declining relationship between doctors and patients is rapid proliferation of medical seats in private medical colleges and limited seats in government colleges.⁽⁸⁾ Seats in a private colleges cost millions of rupees.⁽⁹⁾ On the other hand, getting seats in a government college is difficult because of fierce competition and a doctor puts immense effort and time to make it. So it cannot be wrong to say that doctors from both public and private colleges have high expectations.⁽¹⁰⁾ This dissatisfaction among doctors may result in malpractice by some of them. Malpractice is a major contributor behind degradation of relationship between doctors and patients.

Media personnels or famous people like celebrities also influence the rapport between a doctor and his patients.⁽¹¹⁾ Film actor Aamir Khan's show 'Satyamev Jayate' on health sector tried to decode medical field in India.⁽¹²⁾ He pointed out many of the shortcomings of health sectors meticulously. At the same time he was critical to the doctors too for their earnings. His notation that doctor should not run after money was an ill part of his research work. By saying this, he indirectly made public hostile to doctors. If a popular and influential person like Aamir Khan says like that, a genuine investigation or medication will appear dichotomy for patients and attendants. Painting every doctor with same brush by media most of the time is disastrous.

To conclude, a doctor should not be dealt differently when human rights are concerned. They also have problems in life like others and have certain desires for themselves and their families too. Simultaneously, patients too are not experimental animals like guinea pigs to be ignored and treated badly. They deserve same respect as a doctor. If there is significant improvement in health sector, mutual understanding between doctor and a patient will improve and hopefully things will be better in future.

Furthermore, safety of both service providers and recipients is of prime importance and the regulatory agencies both at the local and national levels should act to avoid the ugly incidents in the health set-ups.

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