Associate Editor’s Column

Need to Humanize Medical Profession

The title of this write-up might appear to be paradoxical, for who is more humane than the doctor who mitigates pain and saves lives? But the way things are moving, the day is not far when people might look upon the doctor as an unavoidable devil rather than a compassionate saviour. A number of videos have gone viral on the social media showing the heartlessness of the medical community. An Akshay Kapoor-starrer shows how the doctors and the para-medics collude to fleece the hapless victims of a patient who has already died but is suggested to be under expert care in the ICU!

This underlines the significance of bringing back to the medical profession the much needed “heart.” The right time for cultivating the qualities of care and compassion and such values is during education. At the time of admission to a medical college, all that a would-be doctor is tested for is the left side of brain dealing with facts and figures, logic and analysis, as if it were only a matter of brain. It may be so when it comes to learning physiology, pathology, pharmacology, etc., but it requires the capacity to empathize and practise human values when it comes to application and these require another kind of education. Surprisingly, not much attention is paid to cultivating this right side of human brain that takes in art and poetry, music and literature – aids to the cultivation of concern for human values.

The fact of the matter is that no medical school in India has in its curriculum the study of arts or humanities. There is, of course, tokenism in the form of cinema or literary clubs but it is one thing to watch a movie based on a classic but quite another to think at length on the message in a regular class. While the study of mathematics and science tends to make one dead sure of facts and logic, that of literature and art enables one to appreciate the attending context and the possibility of truth lying on the other side. Various art forms like painting, cinema, theatre, sculpture and performing arts show effectively the experience of the patient and sensitize the viewer. The study of humanities also helps one’s consciousness to imbibe the importance of ethics and values.

As science advances, the increasing gadgetry and the paraphernalia make medical care an extremely expensive affair. The multinational pharma industry has its own stakes in this and the lure of the lucre among doctors (and more and more are riding the bandwagon) has created an anti-patient situation. This has also resulted in cases of manhandling of doctors in hospitals and protests turning into attacks on hospital property. Herein lies the importance of effective communication learnt through language study. If the doctor spends time to make the patient understand why the numerous tests that he has prescribed are needed, the patient would be satisfied. The doctor needs to spend more time to realize the limits of finances that the patient can spend on treatment and prescribe the tests and medication that the patient can afford. It is also a fact that if the doctor talks sincerely and nicely, it has a therapeutic effect on the patient and part of his anxiety is removed. It is high time for the government to introduce humanities in the curricula of medical colleges.

— Jagdish Batra