

CORRESPONDENCE

Ethics in medical education

This is in response to **Ethical problems in medical education** by Dr. F.E. Udawadia¹. I congratulate him on a well written article that summarises the ills besetting our medical education system.

In his last paragraph, he decries the 'sharp, progressive fall in values all over the world, more so in our country'. I submit that this has happened in our country, slowly and steadily over the years since Independence, due to a steadfast refusal of the educated middle-class to involve themselves in the public sphere, be it social or political.

Social values are not lifeless or abstract but are living entities that need to be nurtured and shaped with time. If abhorrent social behavior is tolerated, it gradually becomes the norm with a gradual, steady downward spiral. We have felt that it is enough to be virtuous while deliberately closing our eyes to the lack of virtue around us. Many more have been guilty of the sin of omission than the few who have actually committed unethical acts.

Even while I was an undergraduate student in a Bombay medical school in the sixties, there were flagrant violation of ethics in the form of favouritism during exams, deliberate flunking of candidates to settle scores among themselves by examiners, hazing of candidates due to rivalry among the medical schools, to name just a few. Training posts and jobs as honoraries or full-timers required 'pull'. Cronyism and nepotism were rampant. The power of money was obvious. The corridors of medical schools were agog with news of one scandal or another but though the doctors whispered about the wrong doing of their colleagues behind their backs, they rarely expressed disapproval to their face.

The reasons given varied from "How can I offend her/him, (s)he is a good friend, our families know each other?", to the straight forward "Well, one needs the help of these people in future, so I can't alienate her/him." to "I don't want to get involved in this muck." and "What can I, a lone person, do against a powerful system?"

That times have not changed this attitude was brought home to me recently when I overheard a conversation where a doctor was relating how he was offered a suitcase full of money to pass a candidate in a postgraduate exam and how he angrily refused the bribe. Unfortunately, his anger did not extend to taking a meaningful action against the person offering the bribe.

If we want to change the medical scene we,

the bystanders, will have to express strong disapproval to the miscreants, unmindful of the result of our action on the miscreant or ourselves. If we can register a complaint with the responsible authorities, however spineless they may be, that would be even better. Even a verbal censure has the effect of modifying objectionable behavior. This has been shown by Dr. Erwin Staub whose study on the role of bystanders was inspired by his observation of the treatment of Jewish people in Eastern Europe during Nazi occupation.

We can certainly change the medical system but before that we will have to change ourselves.

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Reference

1. Udawadia FE: Ethical problems in medical education. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 1997;5:37-39.

Ethics in India

There is so much of 'ethics' in the air, even among our political (frightened) class that there is a distinct fear of the rhetoric becoming hypocritical, imitative and demonstratively vulgar. We shall again elevate ambivalence into a mystique and refuse to see truths steadily. I saw this dance of rhetoric divorced from meaning during an extended tour of Tamil Nadu, with many tall poppies mowed down and yet not seen as guilty by a significant minority! Most of them have bought the argument that for a politician a term in jail is almost the same as losing an election!!- meaning it will pass (- and soon).

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Issues in Medical Ethics (1)

Thanks for sending me the January-March 97 issue of your very significant journal and the subscription slip - this kind of systematisation is good, especially because subscribers tend to forget renewing their subscription unless reminded for. I am enclosing a cheque

As a lay person (I'm not a medical doctor) and a concerned citizen, I find your journal of immense value as it so firmly contributes

to humanity's health in a holistic sense. For your great work (and it's rare now-a-days) I congratulate you and the editorial board members.

Without any doubt, *Issues in Medical Ethics* is the only journal on medical ethics in India. I'm sure in days to come your family of subscribers (medical and non-medical) will be large enough to provide you further sense of its unique worth.

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Issues in Medical Ethics (2)

I congratulate you and **your** staff for publishing such a good journal when all around us scams are going on, morality is at the lowest level and (it is) hard to find doctors doing ethical practice.

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Issues in Medical Ethics (3)

I am receiving your journal regularly and go through it with interest. I particularly appreciated the article on medical practitioners abetting politicians....

One topic which hasn't been discussed so far in *Issues in Medical Ethics* is the unethical promotion of drugs by pharmaceutical companies. Although this may be an obviously unethical and undesirable activity to many of us, there are an equally large number of practitioners who don't see any wrong or even feel it is a legitimate activity. An article on the topic, may be at a 'lower' level than other articles appearing in the journal, may be necessary.

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Issues in Medical Ethics (4)

The journal appears good and most of the cartoons are wonderful. Keep it up.

Recently the Tamil Nadu government enacted a legislation to regulate the