

General practice

I enjoyed reading the articles on changing trends in general practice (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

I was disappointed that no one bothered to discuss the important role patients can play in improving the ethical standards of medical practice. Why do doctors assume that they are the center of the medical universe, and that patients cannot be trusted to make their own decisions? If good doctors spend time and energy in educating their patients, standards of medical practice would improve, as patients would then have tools they could use to evaluate the quality of their medical care - and the quality of their doctor-patient education can help to weed out quacks and unethical doctors who make unrealistic promises.

Dr Aniruddha Malpani, Health Education Library for People, Mumbai.

References:

1. Pednekar A. Changing trends in general practice. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 7-8.
2. Rao BC. Unholy alliances in general medical practice. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 9-10.
3. Ali Mushtaque. D is for doctor... *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 11.
4. Merchant A B. Improving the ethics of medical practice *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 12-13.
5. Bawaskar HS. General practice in rural areas. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 14.
6. Nagral Sanjay. General practice: some thoughts. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 15-16

In a minority, but not alone

Dr. Bawaskar, in his two pieces in the last two issues of the journal, has briefly shared with us his principled, ethical conduct in his clinical professional work (1, 2). I am writing this to say that he is not alone. There is a small but significant section of doctors who have been keeping away from the lures of drug companies and other medical companies, and trying to do justice to their patients. What is needed is that such doctors should keep in touch with each other, share their experiences, and act together, whenever there is such a chance, to oppose unethical practices.

One blatantly unethical practice is being promoted currently by the NORMA company, which sells compression stockings for varicose veins etc. A flier by this company offers doctors one Parker pen for every 'client' brought by the doctor to the company. This flier announces

"Write a NORMA prescription worth Rs. 500/- get a parker pen worth Rs. 50/- free. Send us the prescribed patient's order form along with a D.D. of the appropriate amount."

What can we do collectively to stop this practice? The first step is to appeal doctors through various professional journals not to be party to this 'trade-off'. Second, some of us can jointly write to the concerned company that it should stop this unethical marketing. If we can get some well-known doctors to sign this letter, it will have more impact.

The address of the company is Norma DND Products, Norma Complex, DDA Market J-Block, Vikas Puri, New Delhi 110 018 Fax : 91-11-552 1239, E-mail : normadnd@vsnl.com

Anant Phadke, Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes, Pune.

References:

1. Bawaskar HS. Am I a bogus doctor? *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 138.
2. Bawaskar HS. General practice in rural areas. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 14.

Doctors' duties

We in Montreal are very touched by the editorial in the journal (1). Keep up the good work

Shree Mulay, PhD, Director, McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women 3487 Peel Street, Montreal, QC, H3A 1W7 Canada.

Reference:

1. Editorial board. Communal violence in Gujarat. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 3

Correction

In Dr BC Rao's essay on general practice, the line 'A well informed patient will demand treatment after being informed, and explaining a problem spending lot of time,' (Page 10, second column, second paragraph, fourth line) should read, 'A well informed patient will demand treatment based on knowledge and explaining [meaning making him knowledgeable] a problem will mean spending lot more time.'

Reference:

1. Rao BC. Unholy alliances in general medical practice. *Issues in Medical Ethics* 2002; 10: 9-10.

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