

Has India as a Nation failed its doctors?

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Abstract

The continuing attacks on health care providers in India is a worrisome issue. With no adequate measures to ensure workplace safety and no proper laws to punish the offender, the acts of violence against doctors are increasing at an alarming rate.

While media houses sensationalise trivial issues and political institutions refuse to own up responsibilities, the doctor – patient relationship has hit an all time low.

The need of the hour is a permanent solution. Better security at the hospitals, strict laws and stringent punishment to the offenders, cooperation from the media houses and the local governing bodies/politicians to ensure that the trust of the patient in their doctors is restored and the Indian public starts viewing their doctors as healers and not machineries of loot and negligence.

Article

Every day we wake up to the news of yet another gruesome attack on a doctor, more over so it has become such a daily routine for us that it isn't shocking anymore!

The news of a group of men, often weaponised, walking into the hospital, vandalising the property, manhandling the hospital staff, beating up the doctor to a state where he is either severely injured or dead has become a daily nuisance.

While the media casually reports a sensational story of how a critically ill patient brought into the casualty of a busy hospital was denied admission due to the lack of beds,(5) his attendants

asked to buy medicines from outside of the hospital,(4) or publishes appalling pictures of how an attendant is standing with an IV drip in his hand while it is being infused onto his patient owing to the lack of an IV stand(3), it very inadvertently portrays the doctor to be at the helm of every event. Scapegoating the physician, while dramatizing incidents in addition to selling papers, sells a negative image of the medical community to the Indian population. But are the doctors actually to blame? Agreed that there are true instances of medical malpractice, negligence and corruption that are heinous and must be condemned, and the culprits brought to the books. But here, with the same brush, we tar all doctors and resort to public shaming of doctors on public forums. This sounds like a public witch hunt for a vulnerable doormat, in order to divert attention from the complete failure of the Governments, present and past, to provide affordable, quality healthcare for its citizens.

We live in a country where more money is spent on election rallies and campaign advertisements than on public health (1) India spends just 1.4 per cent of its GDP on healthcare — well below the 6 per cent world average and the 3.1 per cent spent in China, its more affluent rival (2) While it's very easy for a local public officer to reach the incident site, take up the mike, and assure the public of an inquiry, it's very difficult to own up the responsibility . It's high time that the Indian population realises that it's not the doctors who are funding their public health hospitals and hence are not responsible for the lack of infrastructure, medicines or beds, yet they go out of their way to help the patients and their attendants in every possible way that they can.

What is more horrendous is every time such an incidence of violence occurs a set cycle of events take place, the doctors of the said hospital go on a strike, followed by an assurance of a safer workplace environment and better security by the local administration, the strike resolves, the assurances are never implemented on the ground level, yet another incidence takes place.

The Medical Protection Act aimed to protect doctors from assault and damage has been passed in 18 states in India. But, political considerations and demands that the Act be made more patient-friendly have come in the way of enactment of the law in the other states. (6) The need of the hour is a permanent solution. Better security at the hospitals, strict laws and stringent punishment to the offenders, cooperation from the media houses and the local governing bodies/politicians to ensure that the doctor-patient relationship, which at present has gone to the dogs is amended, the trust of the patient in their doctors is restored and the Indian public starts viewing their doctors as healers and not machineries of loot and negligence.

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