Blatant Exploitation: Are Junior Doctors overworked?

Review

The topic is pertinent and timely, especially given the recent backdrop where incidents of doctors (usually junior doctors) being harassed and abused by mobs that often might not even be related to the patient over whom the altercation ensues, has become very visible.

Literature exists on this phenomenon of doctors being attacked and abused by patients and their families; this is not a new phenomenon and not restricted to India only. However, the need to discuss this issue never abates because of its complex nature: there are several questions that impinge upon these instances where mobs physically abuse the (junior) doctors. We need to understand the role of the doctors as frontline care providers, the responsibility of patients and their families, the role of ‘security’, the responsibility of the hospital and also of the state, the state of healthcare in the country, the issue of how doctors decide to stage their protest (viz. strikes) and the ethics of that, psychological factors like how ‘mob mentality’ works out, issues of power and authority, the issue of (the non-medical) society ‘getting back’ at those (i.e. the doctors as a class) who otherwise hold the patients at ransom in some ways on other days … and others.

This present submission does not refer to this literature; it does not evoke the multiple other angles to investigate the issue; it does not also describe the different cases of doctor-abuse that took place in India in the recent past; what it does is to talk of the phenomenon in general terms – as a social malaise.

In the second last paragraph the submission talks of the repercussions of such attacks, and does make a fair attempt at presenting the ‘two sides’ of the story, so to say. It mentions that poor communication is majorly responsible for the eruption of such events. The author ends with some recommendations – some of which are policy level recommendations and some pertain to responsibilities of the hospital.

Reviewer recommendation

To repeat, the topic is important, socially pertinent and timely and I recommend the journal to give space to this piece; however, this is a short opinion piece and does not qualify for a comment. Also, the ethical dimensions of the issue are not foregriounded and needs to be done in a brief way.

I recommend publishing this (after editing) as a ‘Letter to the Editor’.