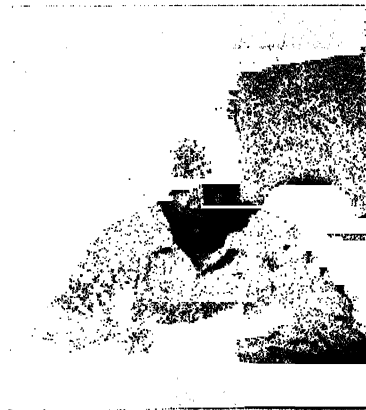


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PHYSICIAN-PATIENT FALLACIES AND FOIBLES

All of us are not doctors, but only physicians unless we had obtained a doctorate degree in medicine. But an illiterate politician or actor / actress could be a doctor because some XYZ University had conferred an honorary doctorate degree. But there was an exception, when the Oxford University declined to confer an honorary doctorate on their Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher. In this undistinguished company, a medicine man would be able to keep his self-respect better if he were to be content and calls himself a physician. But the craze to be called a 'Doctor' is much too powerful. So let it be.

Physician - heal thyself - is an old saying and was probably meant to indict sickly looking/or sick physicians. I remember a very famous specialist who arrived at the Madras General Hospital in a Rolls Royce Car suffering intensely agonising pains and urgently needed a room in the pay ward. None was available. I was then vegetating in one of the posh paying rooms living on a course of Sippy's Diet. So when my physician requested me to get discharged to oblige his suffering fellow physician, I got out in double quick time to continue my Sippy's diet in the more congenial atmosphere of my home in my village. But what was really noteworthy in the episode was that the suffering physician was brought by his patients who surrounded him and continued to visit and consult him even in his sick bed almost until his death a few days later. The physician was in a highly uraemic condition. He was a chronic alcoholic. But my brother who had once consulted him earlier told me that while he started his day with alcohol and continued with alcohol all day, he was a brilliant and most lovable and gentle physician. Physicians are many times drug addicts, pethidine and morphia being the more common ones in use at present. I had once consulted a physician who rose rapidly in name and fame in both medicine and surgery, but was later an in-



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mate of a hospital for Mental Diseases. The then Superintendent of the hospital, who takes homoeopathic medicine, enquired from me whether homoeopathy can cure or help a fellow physician suffering from drug addiction and withdrawal symptoms. It was then revealed on my enquiry that the drug addict in this case was the same brilliant man whom I had consulted. His weakness was morphia.

My own favourite physician of an earlier era is one Dr. Axel Munthe, M.D. (Paris) whose book "The Story of San Michele" has been my most read book since 1944. He gives a case of a physician who was doing brilliant work and rose to become the most popular physician in Rome in a very short time. He described him as follows - "The more I saw of him the more was I struck with the morbid acceleration of his whole mental machinery, his restless eyes, the extra-ordinary rapidity of his speech.... read the terrible truth in his eyes.... he was a madman. The next day I found him in his consulting

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room, standing before the mirror, staring with his protruding eyes at the slight swelling of his throat, the enlargement of his thyroid gland, I had already noticed. The extra-ordinary rapidity of his pulse made the diagnosis easy. I told him he had Grave's disease.... He died the following year, I understand, in an asylum".

So one can go on with the fallacies and foibles of physicians. But the extra-ordinary red strand running through these life stories of physicians foibles is the great success many of them achieved upto a point in their lives and then the sudden collapse of a once great reputation. So what would have happened if by some miracle, the sick physician had cured himself of his alcoholism, drug addiction or disease? Could he have become a greater healer? So what is the validity of the saying "Physician Heal Thyself".?

I would venture to suggest that the basic criterion for a successful physician is to inspire confidence in his patients. So he should look healthy first. Most highly successful physicians get their clientele because of their reputation. The confidence of the patients does the rest. One of my relatives wanted only one particular physician whatever the nature of her illness be over a large part of her life. This physician had one grand characteristic. He never spoke. I tried several times to pump him on what he thought was the nature of the disease he was attending. The maximum I could get was a parting of the lips and a thin smile. I had assessed him later as a mediocre or average physician who was shrewd enough to realise that if he opened his mouth and talked to his patients, he would expose his weakness or ignorance and so, silence was truly golden in his case. In my native town, a LMP physician of the Local Fund Dispensary was also the silent type, who always obliged any citizen by making house calls whenever requested and sent no bill and collected only four annas for his tonga. He became so popular that a big industry in the town later employed him as full time physician with five star facilities. This physician also was mediocre and had a limited set of pills, mixtures, ointments and tonics in his repertoire. I had seen him commit egregious blunders in complaints out of his routine. He ultimately became very rich, but his reputation collapsed.

To go back to Dr. Axel Munthe, some of his comments on his fellow physicians are worth recalling. At the time he was practising in Rome, it had a large number of foreign doctors. One of them with a roaring practice had a large contingent of rich women patients. To quote "As far as I could make it out, his method consisted in putting these women to bed at first sight with a stunning diagnosis of some grave ailment and to allow

them to recover slowly by gradually lifting the load of the suggestion from their confused brains". I have many such examples in my experience. One was a fellow homoeopath who scared the day lights, out of a 3rd year medical student with a diagnosis of cancer in a leucodermal discoloration of the inside of the upper lip. There is another popular lady doctor who regularly threatens her women patients having some vicarious discharge that they will surely get cancer if they fail to take her treatment. This kind of scare with a diagnosis of grave disease is becoming increasingly rampant among the modern physicians. I always wonder how many cases of proven cancer or other grave diseases does the average physician see.

I have heard of long queues of people seeing Dr. So & So a homoeopath. If the queues are a criterion of the abilities of the physician, then he would be the greatest physician on earth. But then why do the relentless crowds throng them. One such patient remarked that he had a skin trouble and Dr. So & So treated him patiently and cured him. He proudly announced that it took seven years for him to get cured. One doctor - one complaint and seven years. How many physicians can claim such stubborn loyalty and patience? Since the man was about 35 years old, he had spent 20% of his life in getting cured of one illness. The patients in these long queues utter hardly a word or two before the physician. Prepacked medicines are doled out to them with no pretense of a consultation or examination. There used to be a very popular and successful physician in the 30s and early 40s at Madras and his standardised prescriptions were only two - one a pink mixture containing such ingredients as Mag. Sulph, a carminative etc., the prescription was a cure all. Today, ofcourse, they are all dry neatly packed in aluminium foil or encased in gelatin capsules in different colours, In certain cases as many as 40 capsules and pills are consumed by patients day after day. One may wonder how the human body can stomach all this variety and volume and still come up smiling. The answer in what Axel Munthe said of a lady diagnosed as having angina pectoris and was in bed for over a month, attended night and day by two nurses, temperature taken every four hours, hypodermic injections several times a day, the minutest details of her diet regulated with utmost scrupulosity, sleeping draughts every night, infact everything she wanted. He said that this woman was a case of hysteria classified as a malade imaginaire, and looked remarkably well and had no more angina than he had. Luckily for her, she was as strong as a horse and quite capable of resisting any treatment. She seemed to suffer from the same trouble that a majority of the rich patients suffered namely, an idle life, too much money, a craving for being ill

and being visited by the doctor".

The answer to the puzzle posed earlier could well be that a majority or a good number of people thronging the consulting rooms and hospitals have some atleast of these symptoms without anything being really wrong with them. So, when they receive a doctor's attention however fletingly and made to swallow or get injected various substances, their felt need is largely satisfied and their basically healthy body is quite capable of withstanding the pills and injected drugs for a long time. How many physicians are capable of telling such people that they needed no medicine. Even if one did say so, the same people would go to some less scrupulous physician. The famous humourist P.G. Wodehouse had parodied this morbid, human weakness in many of his stories. He selected the health resorts called 'Spa' in Europe as the scene for such stories. In one such story, he had this to say about invalids - Quote 'There is no section of the community in which class consciousness is so rampant as among invalids. And this was particularly so in those places where invalids collect in gangs - Baden - Baden, for example or Hot springs. In such resorts the atmosphere is almost unbelievably clicky. The old aristocracy with maladies that get written up in medical journals keep themselves to themselves rigidly. For example, when it was discovered that all one had wrong with him was a touch of gout in the right foot, the man was cold shouldered by the men and thrust back on the society of asthmatics and fellows with slight liver trouble. So when a man comes along and declares that he had been in all the most famous hospitals starting as a child with congenital pyloric hypertrophy of the stomach, and that he was interviewed by Lancet, that he had thrombosis of the heart and vesicular emphysema of the lungs, that once his temperature went upto 107.5, all the Dukes, Earls and Knights who were there, invite him to become the head of their little club'. (Of Course spoof).

The pathetic belief that every disease can be cured or should be medicated, injected or operated upon is at the root of most unnecessary and undesirable medication and surgery. This belief held by lay public is carefully and assiduously nursed by pulp magazines, media, the physician and the surgeon. But the most powerful force helping to perpetuate this myth is the "well-wisher". Most of us know the story of the father and son team who were walking their donkey for sale. The cheapest and most abundant commodity in this world is unsolicited advice from others, friends, strangers, relatives, our own near and dear, in fact every idiot Tom, loafer Dick and idle Harry. They may be ignorant of any knowledge on anything. But they are always profuse in offer-

ring advice if you happen to be suffering in front of them. In the case of our relatives, they need not even be in front of us. They will all write or journey to your place just to offer you advice. They all know the best doctors or the most reputed miracle healer. In a recent case a hemiplegia patient who was slowly responding to homoeopathic medicine underwent a brainscan. It was suggested that some tumour might be present and he was referred to a surgeon who proposed immediate surgery. But I and the patient's son-in-law strongly recommended postponement since he was responding to medicine. But every member of his family voted unanimously for immediate surgery, which was carried out. Two months later the patient's conditions showed no improvement inspite of repeated post operative radiation exposures. Soon after the patient died. Almost the same fate could overtake any unfortunate person who becomes paralytic, unconscious or lose his mental balance, or has terminal cancer - suffer intensely before he is allowed to die, all done with love, kindness and the best of intentions. Bernard Shaw wrote a play 'Doctor's Dilemma' and a long preface to it. In this he described the above scene in his inimitable style. Quote "Thus everything is on the side of the doctor. When men die of diseases, they are said to die of natural causes; when they recover (they mostly do) the doctor gets the credit of curing them. In surgery all operations are recorded as successful, if the patient can be got out of the hospital or nursing home alive - when an operation is once performed, nobody can ever prove it is unnecessary - patients are encouraged to imagine that modern surgery and anaesthesia have made operations much less serious. The patient does not feel the knife and the operation is, therefore, enormously facilitated for the surgeon, but the patient pays for the anaesthesia with hours of wretched sickness and when that is over there is the pain of the wound made by the surgeon, which has to heal like any other wound. That is why operating surgeons, who are usually out of the house with their fee in their pockets before the patient has recovered consciousness see nothing of the suffering witnesses by the nurse. Can any one doubt that under existing conditions a great deal of unnecessary and mischievous operating is going on". Talking of trade unionism and science Shaw said "The test to which all methods of treatment are finally brought is whether they are lucrative or not. It will be difficult to cite any proposition less obnoxious to science than that advanced by Hahnemann; to wit, that drugs which in large doses produce certain symptoms, counteract them in very small doses, just as in more modern practice, it is found that a sufficiently small inoculation with typhoid rallies our powers to resist the disease instead of prostrating us with it. But Hahnemann and his followers were frantically perse-

cutted for a century by apothecary - doctors, whose incomes depended on the quantity of drugs they could induce their patients to swallow. These two cases of ordinary vaccination and homoeopathy are typical of all the rest".

Some more excerpts from Shaw are worth-thinking over even today. Quote "We are left in the hands of the generations which having heard of microbes, suddenly concluded that the whole art of healing could be summed up in the formula, find the microbe and kill it. They conceive microbes as immortal until slain by a germicide administered by a duly qualified medical man. In the frenzy of microbe killing, surgical instruments were dipped in carbolic oil, but as microbes are so fond of carbolic oil that they swarm on it, it was not a success from the anti-microbe point of view. Formalin was squirted into the circulation of consumptives until it was discovered that formalin nourishes the tubercle bacillus handsomely and kills men. The popular theory of disease is the common medical theory that every disease had its microbe duly created in the garden of Eden. If this had been even approximately true, the whole human race would have been wiped out by the plague long ago, and every epidemic instead of fading out as mysteriously as it rushed in would spread over the whole world. It was also evident that the characteristic microbe of a disease might be a symptom instead of a cause. When there was no bacillus, it was simply eluding observation.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, at the time of the first great epidemic of influenza, a London evening paper sent round a journalist patient to all the great consultants of that day and published their advice and prescriptions. The case was the same, but the prescriptions were different and so was the advice. The newspaper reporting this was denounced by the medical profession as a breach of confidence of these eminent physicians.

The distinction between a quack doctor and a qualified one is that only the qualified one is authorised to sign death certificates.

Tonsils, vermiform appendices, uvulas, even ovaries are sacrificed because it is the fashion to get them out, and because the operations are highly profitable. The psychology of fashion becomes a pathology.... fashions after all are only induced epidemics."

Now another great writer Mark Twain, whose research into the cruel practices of animal experiments and vivisection is a classic had written extensively on nature cure, allopathy, homoeopathy and a faith cure

called Christian Science. Our own father of the Nation, Gandhiji, was a great experimenter in natural healing and had commended homoeopathy. It is time that in the euphoria created in our minds about the new drugs and therapies, we should not forget that even today, there is no reliable cure for such common diseases as cold, flu, measles, enlarged tonsils, adenoids, keloids, jaundice, gastritis, kidney and gall stones, constipation and headache, tuberculosis, diabetes, arterio sclerosis, circulatory disorders, cataract; senile dementia, and mental disorders are on the increase, providing that while therapeutics are advancing, preventive methods stand exposed as primitive organ transplants have a negative effect on medical therapeutics, as the required research and pursuit to find a cure for preventing and curing heart, kidney, lung, liver, and intestinal diseases no longer seem imperative.

From removing tartar from teeth, reabsorb pus, blood clot, arrest internal bleeding and free the joints, the spinal column and other articulations of disabling and painful stiffness, ankylosis, arrest calcium imbalance leading to brittleness or softening of bones are all fields where medicine is still to make any breakthrough except in homoeopathy. There is one interesting statistic-homoeopaths who take their own medicine have an enviable record for longevity starting from the founder Hahnemann himself. May, I, therefore commend fellow-homoeopaths who give homoeopathic drugs to their patients, but call in the best allopath when they or their near and dear fall ill, to this interesting statistic?

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