

Dialogue with the Stalwart

Interview with Dr. B. M. Hegde

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Dr.B.M. Hegde

The era of Modern Medicine has made a huge leap in diagnosis and disease management. However, it has sadly led to a downslide in good clinical bedside skills and doctor patient relationships.

Dr .B. M .Hegde, an eminent cardiologist, medical scientist, author, and the ex VC of Manipal University needs no formal introduction. He is very sad that modern medicine has lost its heart and is being dehumanised. He is also a Padma Bhushan and B.C.Roy Awardee as an eminent medical teacher. He was a Visiting Professor of Cardiology at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School in London between 1982 through 2002. He was also the first Indian examiner for the MRCP (UK) examinations between 1988 through 1998 and later for MRCPI examinations from 2000. Various books on topics ranging from Holistic Health, Quantum Healing, Modern Medicine and Ancient Indian Wisdom have been authored by him and several of his speeches on diet, role of the human mind in healing etc. are viral on many social media platforms. It was indeed a privilege to attend his stimulating guest lecture, "Is Bedside Medicine Dead?" at Chettinad Hospital & research Institute recently. Here are a few excerpts from his interview.

Who were the greatest inspirations that stimulated your success and current line of thought?

My teachers, my mother and my patients and students. But primarily, I would say the credit goes to my elementary school teachers and my Headmaster. I still vividly remember those years where everyone got 4 shots of the small pox vaccine. My headmaster used to apply a paste of Tulsi leaves on 3 areas to subdue the violent reaction it used to produce. Though he did not have any major medical knowledge this very dynamic imaginative and confident attitude inspired me to question various issues in the medical field and do research on the less explored areas and techniques, what I call as refutative research.

Of the several books you have authored, the book titled "What doctors don't get to study in medical school" is considered a holy treatise on medicine. Could you share some thoughts on this book and what stimulated you to publish it?

Though the title implies it is meant for medical students, I would say it is for the common man and patients too. Modern medicine has lost its human touch and has become more doctor- centric rather than patient centric. In this book I have highlighted the pitfalls in current medical thinking and offered an alternative and humanistic approach which I feel all doctors should know. I always tell my students to treat patients in the same way that they would like to be treated if they were to be patients. Sick patients are happier in their own homes rather than at a hospital and not surprisingly recover well with home based therapy. This was scientifically proven in a famous study done in Sheffield and Bristol in the 1960s called the "Heart attack study". Patients who had a heart attack without concomitant congestive failure managed conservatively at their homes. They had better outcomes than those managed in hospitals. I have given many such instances in this book where students are encouraged to adopt a more humanistic approach in patient care and not get carried away with consumerism.

What are your views regarding medical research in India?

Under the banner of research, many pharmaceutical companies are promoting their interests in cahoots with medical practitioners. This type of research should be strongly discouraged though sadly the medical community is largely responsible for this. Research should be refutative and not repetitive. There is no point in doing research in already well-established areas. Instead, unknown areas should be explored and research should be meaningful, ethical and translated to the patient's bedside. Today's medical research is "me too" research and is not worth the paper on which it is written; many of them are full of fraud as well.

Many chronic diseases do not have a permanent cure in Allopathy. What is your opinion on the alternative systems of medicine?

I think we should not be using the term alternative in the first place. Earlier, there were several disciplines like chiropractic, acupuncture and ancient Indian systems like Ayurveda and homeopathy which were functioning alongside Western medicine. Except homeopathy all other systems are allopathy (allo=against; pathy= pathology or disease). Slowly, Western medicine has become the dominant branch and all other branches are regarded as alternative, thanks to its claptrap. Modern medicine is most rewarding in fields like emergency medicine and corrective surgery. Most of the chronic diseases are related to diet, lifestyle and the state of the mind. As ancient Indian scriptures say, "your food can be your medicine" but I keep reminding my students that "it is not what you eat that kills you as long as you do not overeat; but what kills you is what eats you (your negative thoughts)". Hence I feel all branches should be combined under one roof and be available to the common man. Call it integrated medicine, if you like.

What are some of the challenges you faced in voicing your opinions?

Swimming against the current is very difficult. For the last 50 years I have faced all kinds of problems from jealousy and anger to threats and challenges. Recently a "great cardiologist" from a Corporate Hospital challenged me for an open debate which did not materialise. Rightly so as these topics cannot be debated like political debates. The worst is that no funding agency funds your work. No "respectable" journal publishes your ideas. "Peer review" system exists to shut down dissenting voices. Medical research has become a farce. John Ioannidis, a professor at Stanford has shown that around 95% of published research cannot be replicated! How did I overcome it? We started the World Academy of Authentic Healing Sciences and a journal with it-The Journal of the Science of Healing outcomes. While I have been the founder editor in chief, I had such wonderful co-editors and editorial committee members with some Nobel Laureates. So publishing is not problem now.

What is your vision for the future of medicine?

To setup a large scale research centres where simple and locally available natural products are studied without the interference of pharmaceutical companies. Cancer treatments like chemotherapy and radiation are double edged weapons as healthy and normal cells are both damaged in the process. Many naturally occurring and locally available products like turmeric, garlic, ginger, brahmi and many such like have shown remarkable properties in treating various diseases. I would like our researchers to work with such products that can significantly change the way cancer and other lifestyle diseases are now being managed. The future of medicine is in the hands of our medical students who are our hope. So we need to educate them to be curious. Curiosity is the best school bestowed by Nature on mankind, but James Macaulay changed it to the parrot repeating western style schools in India. We are still intellectual slaves of western thoughts even after 6decades of political independence from them.

Just A Minute, Please!

No right thinking person disputes the benefits of regular exercise. It promotes health by reducing the risk for diseases like type 2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Physical Activity Guidelines (2008) recommend a minimum of 150 minutes of physical activity of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity each week for a healthy living. However, majority of the people world over fail to achieve those targets citing most often "time constraint" as an excuse (although FOWO – fear of working out – is more likely!). Results of a new study done at McMaster University in Canada will force them to find a new excuse. In that study, the researchers found that three 20 second vigorous cycle sprints separated by 2 minutes each of low intensity activity three times a week (sprint interval training or SIT) produced the same health benefits as the longer activities recommended by the guidelines. Apparently, brief bursts of intense activity are highly effective. Surely, even the busiest person should be able to spare 1minute in two days. So, what will be the new excuse for skipping the workout? (PLOS One, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0154075>, published online 26 April 2016.)

- Dr. K. Ramesh Rao