

Peace of Mind

Philosophy for the Physician

Pandiyan N*, Puvithra T**, Radha P***

*Chief Consultant & HOD, **Consultant & Assistant Professor, ***Senior Consultant & Associate Professor, Department of Andrology & Reproductive Medicine, Chettinad Super Speciality Hospital, Chennai, India.

Chettinad Health City Medical Journal 2018; 7(1): 19

This is an attempt to describe in detail the thoughts and opinions, rather random ramblings of a group of us, who are empathetic and sensitive to human suffering, pain and illnesses, like many other physicians in this world. The basic undeniable truth is that mankind faces diseases and disabilities from the time of birth until death. The entire life span of every human being is troubled with potential problems, be it deformities or birth defects due to reasons varying from genetics to accidents to misuse/ abuse of nature, body, diseases and the medicines used to treat them.



What are the concerns for the Physicians?

The birth of a child, which is the beginning of life, is the gift of Mother Nature. But the anxieties start building up to check that each and every organ is functional and that there are no defects or deformities. While science has progressed so much that we are able to reduce the child and maternal mortality rates, we have to go a long way in reducing the incidence of chromosomal and genetic disorders like Down's syndrome and other possible birth defects. It is a constant battle for science to achieve progress and success in perfecting the art of medicine - be it eradicating diseases such as polio and smallpox or controlling tuberculosis and Typhus or struggling to fight diseases such as cancer.

The focus is on curing the illness, reducing the pain and suffering, providing comfort, finding remedies. But have we been successful? Yes and No. To a large extent science has found answers and remedies. But are these perfect? No. It is a slippery path that we tread on. The more we progress in scientific discoveries, numerous are the new health issues that come up, especially in the fast paced modern life. Often the remedy seems to be worse than the maladies. The perfect example would be the current 'Opioid Crisis' in the USA.

Today we are steadily leading a life away from nature. Our forefathers had the sense to live closer to nature and its diktats. But sadly their way of life is forgotten in the technology driven, ever shrinking world that is ours.

So, it is the best of times but also worst of times as Charles Dickens would say. Science has progressed in leaps and bounds resulting in longevity of life and successful eradication of many diseases. However, we have also seen life style changes affecting young people with maladies such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardiac problems. The government machinery splutters in its inability to cope with the maladies of the teeming millions. Hence the mushrooming of any number of labs and clinics for innumerable tests has become an ancillary industry to the hospital industry!

Modern day Medicine is a victim of its own success. Why? While trying to fix one health issue, the notorious

side effects rear its ugly head like an octopus! The more 'scientific discoveries and solutions', the more newly found diseases. In the constant battle against diseases, man does not always win and cannot find answers to a whole range of health issues. Doesn't this remind us of Man being, after all, a humble mortal!

Yet another question - how good is science or medical knowledge? What is right for Peter could be wrong for Paul! Though human beings are broadly categorized into races based on the colour of their skin and body structure, by and large mankind is besieged by similar major illnesses and hence focus is on scientific remedies. However one man's nectar could very well prove to be another's poison. This is true of medicines. What works for me may not do so for you! So can we generalize and say one size fits all? But can we personalize medicine? If so, what about costs? How precise can they be for a particular individual or a group of individuals suffering from a similar disease? Can the doctors qualified in super specialities focus on this individualistic precision based medicines to cure the disease? Will this kind of medical intervention be deeply disruptive and if so to what extent? And is it economically viable? Once again, we are faced with the choices of ethics versus economics! Coming to the question of, what is the ultimate goal of every physician? Is it to cure a person through fair practice of science based medicine or to cure him or her by any means, thus making money out of it all! Thus, importance should be given to scientifically proven, evidence based medicine which is least disruptive in terms of value of life rather than economy based medicine. Historically science has proved itself to turn what was considered madness yesterday into mundane issues today and similarly today's dogmas could very well turn out to be Myths.

In our battle against diseases, we win some and we lose some! The bottomline is to treat patients with kindness and compassion, especially when they are in their twilight years and battling inexorably against diseases which end in the ultimate reality that is Death. This is when palliative care gains importance mixed with the right amount of love, kindness and compassion! The young doctors have to be trained for empathized care, while acknowledging the necessity for scientific advances, the foundation of patient care should be woven around compassion, kindness and consideration of human values. In today's world, is this possible when we have lost all sensitivity and empathy towards pain and suffering of fellow human beings?

Can we touch our hearts and proudly state that yes, this is possible? - You tell us!

Acknowledgement : The authors gratefully acknowledge the significant contribution made by Ms. Subashini Murugesan, Retired Ambassador, Indian Foreign Services in improving the article.