

TALENT IN MEDICINE

The medical profession is not different from other workforce sharing with them all common interests, hobbies and talents. The majority of these activities are unrelated to medicine. Many are musicians, performers, artists, writers, critics, astronomers, photographers, etc not to mention their excellence in the world of sports. On the other hand there are also instances when the practice of these activities take the form of applied interpretation of what they know in human pathobiology and the concerned function. Thus some may be historians of clinical practice, clinical pharmacologists of locally used herbs, or clinical therapists of locally practiced folk medicine.

This section of the Bahrain Medical Bulletin will be devoted to "Talents in the Medical Profession" to show and exchange with others common interests and applied experience. Contributors are therefore welcomed to submit their presentation. This issue contains two poems titled "Fools" and "My Goodness" and an article on "Lateral Thinking".

The Chief Editor

FOOLS?

You think man is intelligent eh?
Don't you think he is a real fool?
'Challenger' crashed years ago and look,
Now 'Columbia' has gone too!

If you made the same mistake twice,
You could be called a 'fool' without prejudice!
And who amongst us does not make,
Over and over the same mistake?

Often our mistakes are simple,
Don't immediately harm or cause alarm.
And we may often jokingly tell,
'Fool things I've done, on them I'll now dwell.'

How often have we overeaten and repented?
How often we've gone on the same wrong path,
And said, 'Never Again', 'Never Again!'
How often we've injured others with our words,
And felt bad in our hearts after each episode?

We run after desired objects to take out some pleasure,
We are fooled by their glitter often and in full measure.
The pleasure that seems there is only seeming pleasure,
The pain that lies hidden, we overlook in large measure.

We fall and we rise, we rise and then fall,
All our lives our foolishness takes its toll.
Few can overcome our inherent foolishness,
Few shall see wisdom dawn in their heart's recess!

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My goodness!

All our lives, we keep wondering where is God?
We seldom realize in goodness itself is God.
God is goodness, dears, and goodness is God,
God is good, everything good is therefore God.

When you're in real trouble, hoping for some help,
A good Samaritan arrives and saves you with his act,
Don't you inside feel God Himself arrived on the scene,
He listened to your prayers and sent the good Samaritan in.

Wherever you see goodness, know God is there,
If you have some goodness, God is surely in there
Wow! God is there hidden in each of us, you know,
While we look for Him in heavens He is smiling at us now!

Do good to your friend to make him feel about God,
Do good to your enemy and make him think of God.
Be good, do good, sounds so good, for so good is God,
See goodness all around you and in goodness God.

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Lateral Thinking

Lateral thinking was introduced by a philosopher named Edward De Bono in the late sixties. It was introduced for better creativity as compared with vertical thinking. Lateral thinking involves taking up a new and quite arbitrary position in reaching up to solutions or simply generating new ideas. Lateral thinking has four principles:

Realizing the dominance of an old idea, searching for different ways of looking at things, realizing the inhibition of vertical thinking and finally using and encouraging chance.

Logical thinking has conventionally been the only way to be creative and to be judgmental. It is, however, not the only effective way of thinking. Human endeavour to search for new ideas and methods indicates dissatisfaction with logical thinking. Logical thinking is also referred to as vertical thinking. Vertical thinking is a high probability thinking. People use it because to them is the only known straight-forward pathway, which follows step-by-step logical sequence. Lateral thinking is a low probability thinking, which is used when vertical thinking is unable to find a solution or when a new idea is required.

New ideas are not necessarily product of hard work. In many instances it comes in a flash of insight. Although new information can lead to new ideas, many ideas can evolve without new information at all. The same known information can be put together in a new way. The ability to generate new ideas is related to a particular way of thinking. One should be aware of dominance of the old idea, which is apparently adequate, it interferes with the emergence of new idea. If an old idea is assumed to be the only path leading to new ideas, then new ideas will never come. Exposing an old idea by defining it or writing it down help to avoid its polarizing effect.

Realizing how a dominant idea can be an obstacle is the first principle in lateral thinking.

The second principle of lateral thinking is search for different ways of looking at things. Many discoveries were the result of shift in attention. The shift in attention may be from one part of the problem or another or from one stage in the development of the problem to another.

The third principle of lateral thinking is realizing that vertical thinking is not only ineffective in generating new ideas but also inhibiting. A major disadvantage of vertical thinking is that if it succeeds in reaching to a conclusion then that route is assumed to be the only one available and no need to look backward for other routes. Vertical thinking by logic starts from where the previous route ends. If the previous route is wrong, then by vertical thinking one is moving in a wrong direction.

The fourth principle of lateral thinking is chance. It is possible to use chance deliberately, weird as it may seem, by encouraging the right environment for it and then harvesting its resultant interactions. Play is one ideal method of chance. Purposeless play without design allows chance to construct results which otherwise would not exist. Brainstorming is another method of encouraging chance. It is when all loud thoughts are expressed no matter how absurd and illogical they seem. Another useful technique in using chance, is wandering around a place, which is full of things that are welcomed to stimulate the mind for ideas.

In addition to the above four principles of lateral thinking, there are different methods and techniques that encourage lateral thinking. Thinking in terms of visual images, for example, facilitates flow of ideas. Situations, problems or parts of problems get “frozen” by words and names. This precludes fluidity of ideas. One way of avoiding rigidity of words is to think in terms of visual images. Lines, diagrams, colours graphs and other illustrative ways are examples of visual language which serve lateral thinking. Reversing processes and releasing imaginary boundaries to problems are other useful techniques in lateral thinking.

Although most obvious examples in human history using lateral thinking were in science and research, lateral thinking is by no means restricted to that. It is a way of thinking that can be applied to all situations. New ideas are the positive aspect of lateral thinking. Those who never use it run into disadvantaged vertical thinking. Indeed, such people can be manipulated, for their mind always follows a predictable high-probability pathway.

Lawyers and doctors are among the most rigid vertical thinkers. They prefer things to be rigid, well defined and orthodox. On the other hand, people who tend to use lateral thinking most naturally in their work are journalists and advertising people. They need to continuously develop new ideas for their profession to be successful. By the same token, artists with their dedication to breaking down old conventions and traditions are the supreme users of lateral thinking. Humour is closely linked with lateral thinking. With humour the mind switches back and forth between the obvious ways of looking at things to the unexpected way.

The effectiveness of an idea depends on how it is judged. It is known that judgment depends on past experience. Unfortunately, new ideas cannot be judged on past experience. People are reluctant to adopt new ideas especially those involving major financial cost. Even though, new ideas are generated to save money by proposing more efficient way of doing things, making use of waste material, improving design and so on. Lateral thinking can be acquired just as one acquires a skill in sports. As with golf or skiing one does not become an expert by reading about it. It is a habit of mind that comes with practice and training

Vertical thinking is a natural tendency and lateral thinking is artificial. In order to overcome this natural tendency, it is necessary to be deliberate and even artificial. Some people are lateral thinkers by nature. They are gifted with this talent and do it spontaneously rather than deliberately. I also believe that once a person learns this technique and practices it deliberately, it may well get incorporated into his mind that it may become second to nature.

Lateral thinking allows the freedom to be wrong occasionally in order to be right ultimately. This freedom is meant to allow for creativity, it should not get misinterpreted and abused by allowing “mistakes” in order to reach solutions.

Although I mainly promotes lateral thinking. I believe that by no means one should

rely only on one technique, rather the two types of thinking, lateral and vertical are complementary to one another. For certain situation which is straight forward, vertical thinking can be adequate. In “twisted” situation, ordinary vertical thinking may be inadequate to find a solution, then lateral thinking can be applied. In a situations where new idea is required, vertical thinking is much less effective for this purpose and lateral thinking is the one to be used.

Although most examples in human history using lateral thinking were among scientists, it can be applied in any situation. To best of my knowledge, thus far, there has been no trials on lateral thinking and no research to provide vehicles to explore the path of lateral thinking. I believe this is an area worth exploring although it might be faced with great deal of difficulties.

Lateral thinking is not a new magic formula but simply a better creative way of thinking, which all of us can use whether in our profession or in our everyday life.

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