

## ***Personal View***

### **Always on the Cross**

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They were all in their late thirties and forties, some closer to fifty. Some were mothers of two and some fathers of three children. Some fathers were already bald, others balding. They were from multiple nationalities, at least six on that day. Stress and tension were written large on their faces. That was the stress of examination- it doesn't leave you at any age or stage or experience. They were waiting to enter the examination hall where their fate would be decided in just two hours. They had come a long way though, clearing several hurdles on the way just to reach this final stage of the examination. Their stress was understandable. They had paid a heavy fee for this examination and incurred a lot of expenses on travel and stay. And on top of that, they were going to appear in an examination, the pass percentage of which hovers around 30%. They were all doctors. All were practicing physicians going for a higher diploma. They had travelled from far off lands just to appear in this examination. Why?

They were in it of course of their own choice. They had willingly undertaken to go through this stress at this age, to advance their careers. For if they pass this exam it will change their lives for ever and in many ways. It will change the lives of their children and spouses. With this diploma in hand their designations at work, their pay packages, their nature of duties, their confidence, their attitude, their lifestyle- all would change- for the better. They will enter a new life as if. They are naturally working hard to bring about that transformation in their lives. "No pains, no gains". So they are undergoing the stress with a great purpose in mind.

Well, leave aside the examination and the stress that accompanies it, a doctor's education even otherwise hardly ever seems to have been completed. There is never a full stop to learning in the working life of a doctor. Every day newer and newer modes of diagnosing and treating diseases keep coming up, older methods keep getting outmoded; not only that newer diseases keep cropping up too (never heard of AIDS or HIV before 1981). A doctor has to be literally on his toes all the time just to keep up with the new developments. If he doesn't keep up, he may sometimes be surprised, even embarrassed by questions from his clients who have learnt of the new developments from the electronic media or the lay press.

The major reasons for the mind boggling speed of newer developments are super- specialization and enormous research funding by the money-spinning multinational pharmaceutical industry. A researcher or a research team keeps on digging deeper and deeper into a very narrow selective field and if there were many such small teams looking at small-small areas, imagine the end result - it is an explosion of knowledge.

A super-specialist in one narrow area of the body knows a whole lot about his area but may not know anything about a body part in close vicinity of the organ of his specialisation. There is a joke among doctors, "O, this guy, this guy is specialized in the right eye. (Or say the left kidney)" Implying thereby that don't ask him about the left eye or the right kidney!

The poor general, practicing doctor however has to digest all the knowledge to get for his clients the benefit of the latest developments in sundry fields. There are teams which are churning out new knowledge and the rest have to cope with it all. Remember Donsen's Law: "The specialist learns more and more about less and less until, finally, he knows everything about nothing; whereas the generalist learns less and less about more and more until, finally, he knows nothing about everything!"

The terms CME (Continuous Medical Education) and CPD (Continuous Professional Development) are perhaps peculiar to the medical profession and all doctors must be aware of them. To advance in his career or just to stay in it a doctor must spend more than a minimum recommended number of hours per year in recognized CME or CPD activities.

A doctor is thus always on the cross. Cross as in crucifixion, for he has to be perpetually hard working and up-to-date as well as be kind and generous in his practice. Cross as in cross-roads; for a doctor is faced with dilemmas of choice everyday- when to withhold certain news and whom to tell, when to withhold certain measures, when to institute them, when to withdraw them- all loaded questions with ethical, moral and social overtones. The doctor must do it all irrespective of his own emotions and beliefs and according to set institutional policy. Lastly cross as in cross-examination, for he is always under cross-examination from not only his superiors and clients but also from neighbours, distant acquaintances and even the passer-by; "Hi Doc, tell me what do we do for this?" And the consultation must be thorough and for free – a doctor must be magnanimous and not money-minded, you know!

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Society has great expectations from the doctor. He is a public's man, meant to serve all – with absolutely no distinction of race, colour, cast, creed, faith, nationality, origin, affiliation, habits- his compassion has to be truly all-encompassing- just like God's!

Hard? Well, otherwise he is not a doctor.

**To be a doctor is to be on the cross!**