

## BOOK REVIEW

### Pamper your patients

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Aniruddha Malpani, Anjali Malpani *Successful private practice—winning strategies for doctors*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers Distributors Pvt. Ltd., 2004. *price not mentioned* pp 314

Drs Aniruddha and Anjali Malpani wear many hats. They operate a clinic to help infertile couples. They have set up a library where lay persons can access information on any aspect of health and medical care. They write in a various journals, on a wide range of topics. This is their fourth book. They have also set up a management consultancy on medical practice.

Starting with Dr John Shaw Billings' quotation, made in a different context ('The education of the doctor which goes on after he has his degree, is, after all, the most important part of his education.'), the authors guide doctors striving to build a successful private practice.

Thirty-eight chapters cover such topics as 'Designing your clinic', skills in business management, financial planning, hiring and training employees, crisis management, medical ethics, etc. There are even suggestions on how you can make your marriage work, bring up your children and be a happy doctor.

The readers are advised to attract media attention. We are told that many doctors now employ public relations firms to ensure that their names appear in the media as often as possible. The authors do not disapprove of this practice. Free demonstrations to the media, inviting local celebrities to such events, using hospitals to which the doctor is attached as marketing partners, ensuring the loyalty of doctors referring patients by congratulating them and even their children on their accomplishments and befriending staff members in the clinics of referring physicians are some of the tips offered. Doctors are advised to develop themselves as a brand name. Arguments are offered on why advertising yourself is not unethical. In the chapter entitled 'Winning your patients' loyalty' we are told to apologise to the patient after listening to her complaint whether we are right or wrong. 'The patient is seeking an apology. Offer it so the patient can move forward. Pamper your patients as much as possible.'

Simple English and a chatty manner of writing make for easy reading. Bulleted lists emphasise key points. Wit and humour are scattered throughout the volume. The preface itself, is a chuckle-raiser. 'A hundred years ago...the successful doctor was said to need three things: a top hat to give him authority, a paunch to give him dignity and piles to give him an anxious expression.' Dr Hemant Morparia's many fans will find a generous sample of his cartoons. I was confused by the placement of the cartoons as they bear no relationship to the preceding or succeeding text. One cartoon has been printed twice (on pages 248 and 257).

Statements such as 'As many as one-third of all doctors report that medical practice leaves them dissatisfied...' leave the reader puzzled as there is no evidence to support them. The book has an index but lacks a bibliography.

While I find the authors' suggestions on the organisation of a clinic, streamlining practical, day-to-day tasks, maintaining records, training one's staff and improving their morale useful, I disagree with their recommendations on making myself popular, advertising my capabilities and ensuring that I stay in the limelight all the time. I also disagree with the suggestion that I need to pamper my patients.

My teachers taught me that I belong to an honourable profession with a strong code of ethics and must balance my rights with responsibilities. They advised that I need to be a competent physician and must treat my patients to the best of my abilities, concentrating on their well-being at all times. Empathy with them will ensure that I treat them as I would like to be treated, were I in their place. They also taught me that if I performed my duties properly, patients would seek me out. I was cautioned against the temptation to project myself to patients, family physicians and colleagues in any manner except through my work. I have benefited greatly from these lessons. If it ever becomes necessary for me to use the tactics that dominate commerce, I would prefer leaving the profession of medicine and turning to some other occupation.