

CORRESPONDENCE

Doctors in India suffer from a God complex

People who are unwell first turn to a doctor before they turn to God. Doctors are life saviours. Medical practice is believed to be the noblest profession in the world. A doctor's visit alone can make a patient feel better. Why, then, are doctors in India not the most popular? If you have visited a doctor, you probably know the answer to this question. Every reader of this article is likely to endorse my views including the doctors themselves. A doctor acquaintance himself admits that this attitude is definitely an issue with medical practitioners in India.

In a doctor's perception of the blueprint of life, there is God, there are superhumans (doctors) and then there are humans. Well, with this type of "God complex," there are ever-increasing claims and complaints against doctors. As patients become more internet savvy, they become well informed about their medical conditions and expect the doctor to answer most, if not all, of their queries. The flip-side to this is that patients can gather incorrect information from the Web and question the doctor's knowledge, which takes up a lot of the latter's time. But it is the duty and obligation of the medical community to address all the concerns of patients or their family members.

Dealing with a well-informed patient is a bitter pill to swallow for doctors. Physicians have bigger fish to fry than entertain trivial queries from their patients. The more submissive you are, the better you are liked by your physician. The "I know it all" attitude of doctors in the present age does not go down well with educated patients, who are not willing to just sit and listen. Patients in a doctor's office feel like kindergarten children sitting in front of their teacher, guilty of offences that they did not commit.

In cases where there is room for a differential diagnosis, physicians would rather make a conclusive diagnosis than seek an opinion from a fellow physician. Unlike all other professions where a second opinion is sought from a colleague while troubleshooting a problem, there is a huge barrier in the mind of physicians, called the ego, which does not let them seek the opinion of a colleague. Information sharing and dissemination to patients are just not done in medical practice in India. Having lived in the United States for several years, and having been exposed to the medical system there, I feel the one thing that clearly stands out is the physician's accountability for every action. Physicians in the US owe their patients information regarding their medical conditions.

Another striking contrast is that every hospital or clinic in the US maintains medical records of all patients under its treatment. In India medical institutions and most independent consulting physicians do not maintain adequate records. Patients are responsible for maintaining their own medical records. Maintaining records in clinics or medical institutions can be particularly useful to physicians treating a rare medical

condition; it can prevent reinventing the wheel some time later when a similar case presents itself. Most doctors are also averse to the internet. People in India would rather rely on conventional wisdom than explore new avenues and embrace technology.

It is very unfortunate that in a country like India where we find some of the most skilled doctors, with the best of intentions to serve the people, they fail to meet people's expectations. The knowledge of doctors is not in question here, but their interpersonal skills are. In spite of their shortcomings, we have to admit that doctors are indeed "superhuman." They just need to communicate in a language that humans can understand. Society wants and expects an ideal doctor to heal patients.

So what makes a good doctor? The answer is quite simple. "Be very patient with the patient." Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge, concern and fears, patients tend to ask too many questions, enough to annoy their physician. But good doctors are those who spend adequate time with their patients and answer them without getting impatient. A survey from various countries on what makes a good doctor puts desirable personal qualities above proficiency in knowledge and skills.

Among all the physicians I have visited in Bangalore, either due to a medical condition of a family member or for myself, the two doctors who fit the "ideal doctor" profile are a leading neurosurgeon and a paediatrician. But then, two out of nearly 25 is not a good score.

The intention here is definitely not to offend the medical fraternity. In fact, society is grateful to all medical practitioners for offering their services, for their devotion to their profession and, above all, for letting us have faith in them. At the end of the day the medical community needs to be acknowledged for making the world a better place.

But by being a little more open-minded, physicians can enhance the doctor-patient relationship.

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Correction

In the tribute to the late Baba Amte (1), a paragraph on Baba Amte's religious beliefs refers to his practice of feeding a calf every morning as a kind of worship. The wording of the paragraph implies that the author witnessed this practice in Anandwan. In fact the author witnessed this practice only at Ashokwan. The error, introduced during copyediting, is regretted.

Reference

1. Bhattacharjee Swapan Kumar. Baba Amte: architect of creative humanism. *Indian J Med Ethics* 2008; 5:96.