

## LETTERS

### **Media portrayal of health professionals biased?**

Over the last few years, the media have been repeatedly focusing on corruption in healthcare. Sometimes, speakers on television channels fling allegations at the entire medical community. This biased picture of pervasive corruption is resented by a majority of doctors.

Doctors have been charged with prescribing unnecessary and costly medicines instead of generic medicines. While there is a lot of difference between manufacturing cost and actual price of medicines, how can doctors be held responsible for deciding the price of a drug? It is the government that has to regulate the prices of essential medicines in association with pharmaceutical companies, not doctors.

In an alleged case of malpractice discussed in an episode of a popular television show, Mr R has accused doctors of a corporate hospital of mismanaging a case of cadaver transplant of the liver and pancreas of his wife (1, 2). A nephrologist at that hospital contradicted this saying that Mr. R had withheld crucial information which may have made viewers believe his version. He mentions that Mr R had withheld the fact that the state Medical Council had thoroughly investigated the case and found no evidence of negligence by doctors. The nephrologist has also mentioned that: "The patient and her family were all informed about the risks and benefits of transplantation, more than a year prior to the surgery and informed consent was taken. The patient had developed a massive bleeding condition called Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation (DIC). She received platelets and other blood products to correct the DIC. The surgeon was fully qualified to conduct pancreatic transplantation as well as kidney transplantation and had conducted numerous multi-organ transplantation surgeries. The hospital was also registered for multi-organ transplantation."(2). Television channels and other mass media should confirm the authenticity of information before telecasting it to the world.

The numbers of doctors' licences cancelled in some developed countries and in India have been compared time and again by the media; but no comparison is made of the number of physical attacks on doctors while on duty in India and elsewhere, or of the number of people convicted of such offences; or of stipends, working conditions, duty hours, or accommodation provided to medical students and doctors. Even basic infrastructure and facilities like clean drinking water, subsidised canteens, separate toilets for women, are not provided in Indian government hospitals (2).

The media preaches that brilliant students who take up medicine should consider it only as service to mankind; they should go to other fields if they want to live a good life. Why impose the burden of charity and social service only on medical professionals? It takes almost thirteen years for a doctor to reach specialist status, with a compulsory year of government service after graduation. In fact, doctors are the worst paid professionals for the hard work and dedication they put in. Why are only doctors being forced to work in rural and government hospitals after completing their education? The rural sector surely needs the help of other qualified professionals as well. Why aren't they compelled to do public service after graduation, or prevented from going abroad for better facilities as doctors are? In spite of all the hardships, even today, the medical profession has a fairly large number of selfless and sensitive professionals (3).

The media should present a balanced picture of the profession and exert pressure on the authorities to act against corrupt health professionals. If the media continue to mention only the darker side of profession, it will hurt the country's healthcare system - the public will lose faith in doctors and a large number of students who aspire to be doctors will be dissuaded from doing so.

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#### **References**

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### **Corruption in health systems: view from Peru**

Corruption is defined as the misuse or betrayal of public trust, in order to achieve a personal or private goal, instead of seeking the best for the community or country (1, 2). This is a serious problem for health systems in many places (3). It could lead to a waste of resources, and, even worse, to utterly negative health outcomes (1, 3, 4).