

Chapter 14

Learning Medicine: A Personal View

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ABSTRACT

This is a personal view on experiences in learning medicine from a physician academic and erstwhile vice chancellor of an Indian university. It summarizes his lessons learnt in a medical career that has made him explore medical traditions primarily to refute false dogmas that in his view continue to permeate the sciences to this day.

It is some time ago that Mr. Ron Paul, Congressman from Texas, predicted that the US economy would soon collapse, in his historic speech in the Congress. He was laughed at and ridiculed for those statements. Today he is being remembered by ordinary Americans who are on the verge of losing everything. Similarly, I have been writing to warn our fraternity that our system is doomed to fail and collapse sooner than later, thanks to its obsession with making money at any cost for which we have joined hands with the pharmaceuticals and technology manufacturers (and recently with craze for “health” insurance, another of those American flops) almost from the late 1960s when I wrote a paper on *How to avoid*

modern medicine? “Never make money in the sick room” was the warning given by Hippocrates himself. People ridiculed me and laughed behind my back. There was even an attempt to get me out of my department! Recent IOM audit in the US has shown that the US medicine as the worst among the 14 industrialised countries and the medical establishment there as one of the leading causes of death and disability! Story would repeat elsewhere, if audited.

My colleagues think that I am coming in the way of their making money. That is very far from the truth. I would be the happiest person if they make any amount of money by the right royal way. I was only trying to tell the medical profession that the drug companies and the instrument manufacturers are taking us for a ride using our

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goodwill with patients to bleed the latter of their hard earned money. In the name of regular screening the ignorant people are made to believe that if they went for a regular check up they will live happily ever after. This is another ruse to net more people to take drugs. Recently it was recognized that in the US healthy young people, by the time they reach the age of thirty, are already on at least one tablet daily for some fault or the other in their check up reports. Mind you, this is in addition to multivitamins, baby aspirins and what have you!

The anti-propaganda against the innocent cholesterol, a life saving chemical in our system, mostly manufactured by our own body for its survival, has reached its pinnacle in that most Americans look at least a decade older than their chronological age and are looking famished with their skin coming off its moorings. Cholesterol lowering drugs are a big business hit. Most Americans today hardly eat anything and look sickly! Poor cholesterol, it is having a tough time trying to keep man alive with billions of new cells being formed daily to replace the dead ones. Every cell wall is made up of hydrophobic cholesterol. Lowering cholesterol unnecessarily could result in faulty cell wall which is an invitation for cancer growth!

My daughter always asks me why I write what I write. She is very critical of my quoting US statistics to prove my point in my articles. She is an internist in practice in the US. US is one country where there is total freedom of speech and expression. That should never be misconstrued as freedom to write anything one wants to write and criticize anyone or any country. As long as one knows that one is upholding the truth as is known at that point in time, one need not be worried about anything else. I have a very simple principle in life. Any human activity should be for the common good of people and society. There are so many myths in the field of modern medicine that need to be demolished for the common good. This could never be done with authenticity from anyone outside the field of modern medicine

although there have been attempts by great writers to look inside the medical field from outside and point out the mistakes. Unfortunately, most, if not all of them, blame the malady on doctors and not the system.

George Bernard Shaw is a noted name here. His play, *Doctors Dilemma*, was the one that changed the practice of medicine in England forever. Up until that play was enacted in London many of the *illustrated* doctors there, like many of our *illustrated* doctors today, have been doing whatever they thought was good for the patients irrespective of the consequences of their action. Unfortunately, no one from inside the system tried to undo the damage. Bernard Shaw took upon himself to correct the system having observed the stupidity of many medical interventions of his time. One example will suffice. Sir Arbuthnot Lane was a great surgeon in London at that time. No one could dare to talk to him about what he does. He had a hypothesis that all people with vague symptoms, which today is being labeled as *chronic fatigue syndrome*, had bad toxins emanating from their large gut as the cause of the disease!

His remedy was simple, total colectomy for such patients. Though this was resented by many patients they subjected themselves to the procedure as they had implicit faith in Sir Arbuthnot. Result was that almost half of the rich and famous Londoners was walking with an open drain on their abdomen making the city really stink. The play by Shaw put an end to the procedure and Sir Arbuthnot's practice as well. My efforts are to see that similar fate does not befall us today. Let us try and put our heads together to see how we could get back our position of authority and respect in society as in the distant past, where doctors were looked up to as next only to God. After all, patients could certainly live without doctors, as they had done for ages in the past but, doctors cannot hope to live without patients. Unlike in the 19th century London, information gets round pretty fast these days, thanks to the internet. Before patients leave us and go elsewhere, let us put our house in order.

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