Foreword

Like all children who nurse a dream, mine was to become a doctor when I grew up.

That stately yet warm figure, whom we used to term our ‘family doctor’, with his white starched shirt and twinkling eyes, shining with wisdom and compassion, and a healing touch- aided by little colorful pills and potions in glass bottles- that could soothe away any aches and pains and banish the fevers.

Of course, visits to the biology laboratory and the dissections it entailed in higher grades in school, and the smells that had to be endured, put paid to all my childhood dreams. That and the voluminous tomes with long unpronounceable words that had to be studied in order to get that haloed tag of ‘Dr’.

Doctors had now become for me a symbol of hope, of care and cure, and of moneybags!

In all our collective minds, sometimes unacknowledged, doctors do come to occupy the position of a demigod. Most of us revere their attention and wait painstakingly for a ‘darshan’, oops, appointment, sometimes for a couple of hours, even when we have taken a prior timing and are going to pay handsomely for it!

I have seen patients waiting patiently (pun intended) in snaking queues, when they have been ill and could ill afford to sit, and needed to rest, just in the hope that a ten minute interaction with the doc would alleviate their suffering.

Though I now looked on my childhood longing of becoming a doctor with a distant disbelief, I carried within me a lingering image of awe, credibility and trust that I had always reposed in the medical fraternity. And I did what people who carry a subconsciously tenacious wish do. I married it!

I married a doctor, investing the person with a larger than life image: an image that all of us, at one point of time or the other, in lesser or more degree, especially in our darkest hours, hold on to as a single source of light- an image of an objective scientist, a compassionate soul, a miraculous healer and a good listener imbued with an affable manner and an all knowing heart!

Having observed and interacted with doctors over the years, both from a distance and at close quarters, on a personal level as well as a patient, I am constantly amazed by their ability to work round the clock, keeping erratic hours and irregular meal times, being on call seven days a week, and yet being able to keep a balanced, calm mind amidst the crisis of several genuine as well as hypochondriac cases.

On the other hand I have witnessed the all too human side of them.

Gone are the days of personal attention, when your doctor not only knew your medical history but also your personal one. With the corporate culture now infiltrating even the medical profession, patients have become a number and name, and surgeries are performed on the body rather than the person.

The humane side of the profession has given way to a sterile, objective, clinical evaluation of symptoms. The disease or illness is looked upon in isolation, separating the parts from the whole. We now have super specialists who study a part of the body part. As a result any patient who is hospitalized is attended to by a retinue of specialists and super specialists, all giving their individual diagnosis, which often may even be at variance with each other.
Patients too have a wide choice. Doctor shopping is not uncommon, with an individual visiting 3 to 4 doctors to get an ‘opinion’ before deciding which doc is best suited for the treatment. The doctor of course has a long list of ‘tests and procedures’ to be carried out, and reports to be submitted before announcing his or her diagnosis.

As with all professions, the medical fraternity too has slid into consumerism and competition. Of open ended diagnosis and long drawn treatments, which seem to line several pockets, including those of fast mushrooming diagnostic centers and laboratories.

To be fair, advances in medical sciences have in some case necessitated these. Because of a proliferation of medical knowledge and the easy media access to this, many people have half baked theories and opinions. To cut through this clutter and confusion, reports in black and white and doctors with a cold clinical no nonsense attitude are often the call of the day. And of course, increased stress has released several hypochondriacs amongst us, and doctors need to be able to separate the genuine from the placebos!

In the midst of this melee, there are doctors who really heal. With their presence and wisdom that goes beyond what is mentioned in medical literature, who are old worldly in their approach yet who have kept up with advances in medicine worldwide, who have a pulse placed firmly on the patients state of mind as well as who cure holistically. They are the ones who still retain the nobility of the profession and continue to inspire our respect and gratitude. They are the ones who we lay people call the angels of god.

So it is fitting and timely that Jayita Poduval has come out with her book- ‘Optimizing Medicine Residency Training Programs’. It presents both the human as well as the clinical side of the medical profession. It addresses both the concerns of the patient as well as the doctor. And in doing so helps both sides to come to a better and deeper understanding of cure, concern and care. It bridges the divide that has widened over the years and attempts to cross it with experience, knowledge and instinctive sensitivity. It gives us an inner view of the rigorous life and training of health care professionals and the demands placed on them, nearly 24/7. Most importantly, it offers perspective in an unbiased- yet warm, objective, perceptive, rational and humane- manner on the medical profession, its practitioners and its recipients. It’s a book with a good bedside manner!

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