Reforming Medical Education:
Some Eccentric Thinking

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ABSTRACT

The academic discussions on the way medical education needs to be reformed often revolve around how to make it more interesting & more clinically relevant, while any discussions regarding these issues is welcome, it is equally essential to enlarge the scope of the debate on educational reform from merely focusing on skill related issues and pay attention to an equally important issue of shaping the outlook of a medical graduate who needs to become socially responsible. The paper highlights the depoliticized nature of medical education & its implications on the outlook of a medical graduate. It argues for a need to add a human touch to the medical curriculum, it looks into some initiatives taken in this direction while also arguing for the need to also learn from experiments in other disciplines.

Keywords: Academic Discussions, Medical Curriculum, Medical Education, Medical Graduates, Reform, Social Responsibility

The academic discussions on the way medical education needs to be reformed often revolve around how to make it more interesting & more clinically relevant, while any discussions regarding these issues is welcome, it is equally essential to enlarge the scope of the debate on educational reform from merely focusing on skill related issues and pay attention to an equally important issue of shaping the outlook of a medical graduate which needs to become socially responsible. Medical education today provides the student with skills (the quality of the skills is another issue), but it has simply failed to make them aware of the needs of the society.

So how do we add a human touch to education? The answer is quite simple—by bringing students more close to humans, and how do we bring them more close to humans?? For answering this question, it would be worthwhile to peep into the life of some significant game changing individuals in history,—An Argentinean medical student was just 23 yrs old when he embarked on a bike ride across Latin America, the whole story of this interesting voyage was captured in the book and movie titled “motorcycle diaries”, the student was Che Guevara, he later remarked that through his own travels of Latin America he came in “close contact with poverty, hunger and disease” along with the “inability to treat a child because of lack of money” and “stupification provoked by the continual hunger and punishment” that leads a father to “accept the loss of a son as an unimportant accident”, on the basis of these observations he reached the conclusion that in order to “help these people” armed revolution was the solution and his current occupation as a doctor would not solve many problems (Guevara, 1960).

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While we can definitely differ with Guevara on the kind of conclusions he reached, what needs to be highlighted is that certain experiences, in certain situations can actually wake a human mind out of slumber and can help them redefine questions, can help them understand the multifaceted nature of social problems, for example—foeticide, family planning, malnourishment etc and also, that while the health of an individual is his/her personal matter, “the personal itself is political”, meaning thereby—that often what one eats, drinks or does for fun/occupation is actually determined by a dynamic interaction between individual effort and the larger social forces which actually shapes the kind of choices s/he has—

The complex jargon written above can be simplified and presented with this example—42% child in India are underweight and 59% of them suffer from moderate to severe stunting as per the Hunger and Malnutrition (HUNGaMA) report, 2012 by the Naandi Foundation (Hungama for change, n.d.; The Hindu, n.d.a.). So a curriculum that intends to promote a deeper understanding about the causes and management of malnutrition will have to highlight both the personal aspects of the causes of malnutrition (poor food intake, diarrhoea, micronutrient deficiency etc) and the political causes too (poor governmental outlay for health sector, lack of universal public distribution system for foodgrains, poor sanitation and drinking water facilities etc) and more importantly how the political shapes the personal. Some may be tempted to argue that as health care service providers, the medical graduate needs to limit himself to the technical domain of medical management, while the political aspects can at best be left to the policymakers. What needs to be understood by a budding medical graduate is that malnourishment cannot be tackled unless both the personal and the political aspects of the problem are tackled simultaneously and by virtue of the enormous social prestige doctors enjoy in society, they can play a significant role in reshaping the political policies which affect the health of an individual.

The Politics Of Healthcare & The Absence Of A Student’s Movement—while healthcare policies have a marked influence on the day to day life of an individual and in many cases determines their life chances— for eg, the non-availability of cheap, effective generic drugs dramatically pushes up the cost of healthcare which constitutes around 74% of out of pocket expenditure on health and this in turn pushes around 39 million Indians into poverty annually (The Hindu, n.d.b.), a thorough public debate on the policies of health care in countries like India has been strikingly absent, what is even more disturbing is that a thorough discussion in the medical student fraternity has been totally missing.

At a time when the government of India (GOI) has been busy in framing the 12th plan document for the period of 2012-2017 and is considering the srinath committee recommendations regarding universalising health care (The Hindu, n.d.c.), the total indifference of graduate and post graduate students to these issues is distressing. The poor or little involvement of medical students in the discourse on health care policies reinforces the divide between policymaking and education, where students end up learning the new plans and policies introduced by the government periodically but do not question either the rational of these policies nor do they become effective agents in generating awareness about healthcare issues or providing a platform for voicing alternative opinions. Historically, student unions have raised a gamut of issues from demand for a separate state (AASU, n.d.; The Hindu, n.d.d.) to the policy of reservation in education (Wikipedia, n.d.), healthcare is an issue which has been largely missing from their agendas, this crucial gap can & should be filled in by medical students as their academic background will provide them with a certain leadership advantage in these areas which can be used as a potential starting point for initiating a wider debate amongst masses and also raising their awareness levels. For achieving such ambitious goals, the curriculum needs to repeatedly highlight the linkages between the “personal” and “political” aspects of health care issues.

A scientifically oriented curriculum that utilizes the principles of human psychology
Incremental Neural Network Training for Medical Diagnosis
Sheng-Uei Guan, Ji Hua Ang, Kay Chen Tan and Abdullah Al Mamun (2008).
*Encyclopedia of Healthcare Information Systems* (pp. 720-731).
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