

Who Saves the Savior?

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ABSTRACT

On April 5, 2020, on request from the Honorable Prime Minister, the nation lit candles at 9 pm for 9 minutes. The goal behind this act was to show unity of the nation in its fight against the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and also as a gesture of respect toward the healthcare workers helping fight it. So, while to an outsider it may seem like the doctors in India are put on a pedestal, the ground reality tells a whole other story. A recent study has found that 75% of doctors are likely to face some form of abuse in their workplace. There is an immense need to bring about a change and that has to come fast. The new generation of doctors need to be trained for better communication. However, there also needs to be better infrastructure in place to facilitate doctors to work to their utmost capacity. Today, more than ever, there is a dire need to bridge the gap between civilians and doctors. Doctors and their knowledge and skills, which they spent years learning, need to be appreciated and trusted more. Measures have to be taken by the government and other agency to ensure that the white coat of a doctor gets painted no more in red.

Keywords: COVID-19, Doctors, Violence.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 5, 2020, on request from the Honorable Prime Minister, the nation lit candles at 9 pm for 9 minutes. The goal behind this act was to show unity of the nation in its fight against the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and also as a gesture of respect toward the healthcare workers helping fight it. So, while to an outsider, it may seem like the doctors in India are put on a pedestal, the ground reality tells a whole other story.

A junior doctor from Nil Ratan Sircar Medical College and Hospital (Kolkata) was attacked back in 2019 which led to one of the biggest protests across the nation. Doctors, interns, and residents refused to work and sat in protest along with students to showcase their disdain for the heinous act. It was not the first time this had happened, and the healthcare workers knew it would not be last unless and until something was done. A recent study has found that 75% of doctors are likely to face some form of abuse in their workplace.¹ Most of which is verbal or aggressive gesture. One might think that the massive paradigm shifts we as a society have had to undergo due to the pandemic would change this tendency. That has not quite been the case. Reports of abuse and violence against doctors in COVID-related cases have only gotten worse. Why is it that a nation obsessed with saviors cannot seem to cherish the ones it has got?

THE ISSUE

I feel that our nation is undergoing an identity crisis. On one hand, it is eager to embrace modern science and technology. It is already setting examples in engineering and space ventures. However, on the other hand, it clings on to its traditional roots. This identity crisis is felt gravely in the field of medicine. A patient is caught in two minds. One of whether he should trust modern medicine and treatment or should he go for homeopathic and local remedy. There is a growing mistrust between civilians and doctors.^{2,3} A number of factors have led to this. In every field, there is bound to be a few bad apples and the field of medicine is no exception.

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There have been numerous cases where a doctor has either done negligence on his part or asked for a hefty fee in return for treatment. These patients and their family have developed bitter feelings toward the medical fraternity.³ This mistrust has been carried by them to every future doctor appointment. To make matters worse, there seems to be a misconception that taking homeopathy medicines is a patriotic act. The matter is made worse by the role of media in the whole affair. For a long time now, the news channels have portrayed doctors as greedy money grabbing businessmen rather servants of the people. The media has only shown the public the luxury and privilege of one working in a medical field while completely overlooking the sacrifices that are made.

While a doctor is expected to be empathetical and polite, the same ethics is not expected from a patient. The path to becoming a doctor is not an easy one. While the process of getting into a medical college is a massive feat in itself, the actual struggle begins only when one has entered the field. A doctor works almost a decade with vigorous dedication to serve the public.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic meant while the public were in the relative safe confinement of their home, healthcare workers were cramped in the hospital for long stretches of the day. The rising mistrust between the patient and their family members and the doctor can also be attributed to the lack of proper communication between them.

Emergency wards are some of the most common sites of violence.⁵ Emotions are often running high and the doctors often bear the brunt of the anxiety and stress of the family members. There needs to be better protection for the doctors. However, there also needs to be better communication. There has to be a mediator who serves a link between the steps being taken by the doctors to save the patient's life and the family members.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there needs to be change and one that comes fast. The new generation of doctors need to be trained for better communication. However, there also needs to be better infrastructure in place to facilitate doctors to work to their utmost capacity. There needs to be a general rise in empathy from the medical fraternity toward the patients. The fact of the matter is doctors today are in more risk than they were a 100 years ago. We could light candles and bang utensils everyday but that is not going to change the pseudo-perception build about doctors in both pop culture and news media. Today, more than ever, there

is a dire need to bridge the gap between civilians and doctors. Doctors and their knowledge and skills, which they spent years learning, need to be appreciated and trusted more. Measures have to be taken by the government and other agency to ensure that the white coat of a doctor gets painted no more in red.

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