

Empathy & Respect: Two Vital Virtues of Healthcare Professionals.

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Healthcare providers are the humans with a special status that they use their profession to heal and comfort the ailing humanity. People with lots of physical or mental sufferings look at them for their help. This puts healthcare professionals at a position with highest expectations as regards with the competence, professionalism, and ethics. Different health related regulatory bodies, organizations and societies describe and expect high levels of competencies, capabilities, outcomes, and characteristics for the healthcare professionals to not only develop and acquire but also to exhibit and maintain throughout their professional careers. These may be categorized in different ways. A few of these should be called as "virtues". In this account the focus will be on two of these most important rectitudes.

Every human demands and deserves respect. We are all equal as humans, despite belonging to different social, financial, or educational strata. As healthcare professionals or providers, the basic right of "Respect" should be given to every patient rather every human, even to the attendants. We the healthcare professionals work in a challenging, taxing, competing and monotonous stressful environment. There are typical corridors, ailing visuals, medical gadgetry, echoes of jargons, ahhs and cries. This becomes a routine for us to deal with humans in discomfort. But for a patient or the attendant it may be the very first time. Although we are at a high pedestal but he/ she is not so down also. No matter how compelled we are by the circumstances, should never compromise on the respect. Everyone feels good if respected, just as we feel when people give us respect.

The other very important virtue is empathy. The empathy can be defined in different ways. Farzana Houque has very effectively described the transformative power of empathy, with reference to the healthcare, in a blog with the title "Empathy: The Heartbeat of Medicine" ⁽¹⁾ that.....

"Empathy is our ability to sense and understand other people's thoughts, perspectives, and preferences. Empathy enables physicians to comprehend the nonverbal needs of patients and their families, surpassing the limitations of routine questioning. By attuning to subtle cues and unspoken concerns, physicians can cultivate a deeper understanding and forge a genuine connection to enhance the quality of health care delivery. Sir William Osler said, "A good physician treats the disease; a great physician treats the patient who has the disease."

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We as healers can have a very profound impact on our patients' and their families' lives. Our duty extends much beyond just diagnosing, breaking bad news, discussing complex treatment plans, announcing possible adversities and saying good byes to homes or heavens.

It encompasses empathy, kindness, compassion and a "tender tethering touch". Success is not always a result, rather it seldom is complete. We try to cure but not always successful. So, our duty is, that in addition to the "Cure" we replace "a" with the "u" to make it "Care". We may not be successful in "curing" but will always be successful in "caring".

Imagine turning to the other side of the table, rather bed. Just think how it would feel like being a patient or a family member of a patient. This is not an uncommon event, we all can and at some stage of life do experience this role reversal. And then our expectations are definitely very high from others. A doctor very thoroughly shared his experiences, that he became a much more empathetic physician after he got a metastatic renal cancer. He explained that adverse effects appear insignificant only when we are not directly affected by them. ⁽²⁾

Kneeland & Burden describe that it is imperative to recognize that each of our words and actions have a great influence on patients' thoughts, emotions, and overall wellbeing. Patients' experiences have a positive correlation with health outcomes, adherence to treatment plans, preventive practices, patient safety, and clinical effectiveness. ⁽³⁾

These virtues of respect and empathy are not only for the patients and their attendants. Our fellows who work with us in different capacities also deserve these from us. If the environment is tough for us, so does it is for them also. They have problems, sufferings, challenges, and commitments too. Beneath our white coats, scrubs, name tags & stethoscopes we all are humans. So, a healthy, working, professional relationship studded with a lot of mutual respect and empathy in-turn will make our working sphere comfortable, conducive, and progressing.

REFERENCES

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