

Book Review

The forgotten art of healing and other essays, F.E. Udawadia (Oxford University Press, New Delhi) 2009. 184 pages. Price: Rs. 695.00

This anthology of articles on diverse subjects is unique in more ways than one. Firstly, the topics are important, of contemporary significance, and are written by someone who has had a very long and successful medical practice, teaching as also bedside research.

Sir James Spence noted that the crux of medical care delivery is the coming together of two human beings with mutual trust- one who is ill or imagines to be ill and the other in whom the former has implicit faith. All else, he wrote, flows from this summit where these two human beings meet-called medical consultation. Francis Peabody (1927) had a motto which is also the motto of the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston: "Patient care is *caring* for the patient." Dr Udawadia has written many such articles as also some excellent books, but the topics of this anthology (Greek=a garland of flowers) have been the cream of it all.

Eighty per cent of the final diagnosis and one hundred per cent of the future management strategies could be arrived at by talking with the patient and reading her/his doctor's referral letter. This is further refined only four per cent by the physical examinations and eight per cent more by all investigations including PET scanning, was the conclusion of a triple blind, computerised, prospective study published in the BMJ. The authors were five pillars of modern medicine in London, all former students of Lord Platt, who in 1949, had said that "If you listen to your patient long enough s/he will tell you what is wrong with her/him."

The chapter on the art of medicine is the best in this book and is a timely warning to the high flying sub-specialists of today who go by the scopes, scanners

and the X-ray shadows to treat their patients. They rarely get to know their patients well enough to make the correct diagnosis. The emaciated girl with vague abdominal pain and low grade fever in the book is a shining example of sub-specialists missing the bus. Most, if not all, diseases start in the human mind which can only be fathomed by a good clinician who takes time to talk with patients. No scope or scanner can do that. We need a *mind scope* to fathom the mind- a trained mind of a good clinician. Listening is an art which has to be mastered by every doctor worth his salt for the good of mankind. "Art" wrote Henry David Thoreau "is that which makes the other man's day." Art of medicine is that which makes the day for the hapless patient. A humane doctor has a strong placebo effect on the healing outcomes in patients. Physics now recognises this as *Expectation Effect (EE)*.

The chapters on the history of medicine are superb. Over all, this entire wonderful book is very strongly recommended to everyone interested in patient care irrespective of the system of medicine. The book has been very beautifully brought out by the Oxford Press. The prose is lucid, easy to read and, can easily be compared to those of some leading literary figures in the English language.

That said, I would have liked the author to do some more research on the future of medical care delivery in his chapter on that subject. Modern medical scientific base has been discovered to be very shaky. The recent IOM (Institute of Medicine) audit, USA, an audit body appointed by the US National Academy of Science has shown our system in very bad light. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) touted as the gold standard, have been shown to be badly flawed. The reductionist approach to disease in a fully holistic system, like the human body, is like the square plug in a round hole! Evidence based medicine has truly become evidence

burdened medicine. David Eddy, former professor of cardiovascular surgery at Stanford, in his mathematics PhD thesis in the same university had bared our faulty scientific base. His epochal work could be studied by all doctors in his website www.archimidesmodel.com, where a virtual new human physiology with non linear mathematical base has been worked out for all of us to follow. The futility of regular screening of the apparently healthy has been ably demonstrated by David Eddy.

Douglas C. Wallace, a leading geneticist, in his landmark paper in the journal *Genetics* (2008; 179 : 727) has shown that the very foundation of modern medicine, based on the two strong pillars of Vesalius's organ based anatomy resulting in reductionist organ based specialization, and the Mendelian genetics based on nuclear DNAs, are the reasons for the medical profession being one of the leading causes of human misery and death as exposed by the IOM audits. To cap it, we have the greed of the pharmaceutical and instrument manufacturers who create newer drugs and devices mainly to make money with little consideration for long term safety of human health. Company sponsored research, the in thing today, always "sees what it wants to see in research". Our base is not pure science. It is only statistical science, called *science without sense* by an epidemiologist, Steven Milloy, in his book by the same name.

Mary Tinnetti and Terri Fried sum up the present scenario in their article (*Am J Med* 2004; 116 : 179) thus: "*The time has come to abandon disease as the focus of medical care. The changed spectrum of health,*

the complex interplay of biological and non-biological factors, the ageing population, the individual variability in health priorities render medical care that is centered on diagnosis and treatment of individual diseases at best out of date and at worst harmful." That tells it all! Richard Smith, the celebrated editor of the *BMJ* for quarter of a century, echoes similar sentiments in his recent editorial in the *Journal of the Science of Healing Outcomes* (www.thejsho.com) and redefines health as that state where the person has enthusiasm to work and enthusiasm to "love" (be compassionate). Disease and its absence do not figure there at all.

The last paragraph is not meant to be criticism of this excellent book to lower its prestige; rather it is to show that efforts are on to refute many false dogmas in medicine to take knowledge forwards in that area to do most good to most people most of the time. Karl Popper did warn us that "knowledge advances *NOT* by repeating known facts but by *refuting* false dogmas." Professor Rustum Roy, our leader and doyen of a scientist at Penn. State, has recently introduced, at the meeting of the IOM in Washington DC, the new term *Whole Person Healing* as the *bija mantra* for the future medical care delivery. The IOM has accepted that terminology. All in all, this book is a rare gem added to the plethora of books in the medical literature.

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