

Khan bahadur Ahsanullah Memorial Lecture
(Six Lecture)

Physician's Morality and Hippocratic Oath

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Physician's Morality and Hippocratic Oath

Twenty first century had just started its way. My life is related with three fourth of the last century while travelling this long route of 85 years. The destruction I felt in the personal social & national life is deterioration of morality. This is true not only amongst us in Bangladesh, it is a worldwide phenomenon-starting from the Iraq war to recent bombing episodes in Bangladesh.

We the physicians are not exception. If we recognize part of our client's complaint to be true, it will be a huge list and none of us can be spared. This is certain a mistrust between the patient and Physician relationship. The economic impact of this is drainage of foreign currency nearly 5000 crore Taka every year, by which can built one Jamuna Bridge each year with this amount.

At this moment, I am recalling the Hippocratic Oath, which we all ought to take at the very beginning of our professional career. As you all know Hippocrates the father of medicine was born in the Island of Cos in Greece about about 2500 years back (460 B.C). At his 83 years of life (377 B.C). He was involved in the field of medicine. He has written many books on medicine, the most investment amongst these was "Treatises of Epidemics"

You all know that the oath that is related with the name of Hippocrates has been modifying and here we take oath on eleven issues. The world Medical Association at its third General Assembly at Geneva in September 1948 adapted certain code of ethics, in the form of oath to be taken by all members, at the time of entering into profession. From the position of a senior member of this profession, I would take this opportunity to speak about a few issues of the code in the light of my experience.

1. "I will be loyal to the ideals of profession of medicine and its tradition of service to mankind" so at the very beginning the oath speaks about the responsibilities towards the profession and the mankind. We the

physicians are not only a group of profession rather a very important constituent of the mankind as a whole. Our respectable late National Professor, Dr. Md. Ibrahim used to tell his patient “I am grateful to you that you have given me the opportunity to serve you. It is also the kindness of Allah, that He has also given me this chance to serve you” The empathy of this kind word towards the patients is gradually declining. Treatment is a holistic approach, it always should cover the mental aspect of every patient by counseling or in any other means. Hence WHO as redefined health as.”Health is a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing, not merely the absence of diseases(WHO,1998)” Let us show a little more respect to our patients, let us start it from today. You will be touched by their Love every day.

2. “I will follow the treatment which according to my ability and judgment I consider best for the benefit of my patient and will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous”.

In this part of oath a physician is promising regarding his/her duties and responsibilities towards a patient.

Here I shall share with you two of my experiences on the very beginning of my professional life and another at the end of my government service carrier.

It is about 64 years back. I have completed my medical degree (MBBS) from Kolkata Medical College and I was planning to go back to my native village at satkhira, from Kolkata. I then went to meet my father’s friend Dr. Shib Nath Bose(Shibu Kaka) to take farewell tips and advice from him. How to start my carrier? Then he closed his eyes and looked back in his earlier life. It was my initial period as a physician Shibu Kaka narrated in this way I was taking rest in one of the rainy evening at my house in Kolkata. A widow came with a humble request. Doctor, my daughter is in labour pain and screaming, could you please come and see her? “How much money do you have for me?” Thirty taka, the old widow replied. But I felt some one was whispering in my ear. She got more money with her. If

you press her, you can get more. I can't go less than fifty taka. The woman got this thirty taka after a lot of trouble. So I refused to go. On the next morning I heard the news that the patient died from obstructed labour.

After narrating this Shibu Kaka requested me with pain in his voice you please do not do this type of negotiation with your patient. I still bear this pain and guilty feelings throughout my life, Shibu Kaka said.

The second one is at the last day of my government service in 1988 at the Institute of post graduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR) now Bangabandhu Shekh Mujib Medical university (BSMMU) request me for some advice. I Talked them when a sick patient comes and get cure with treatment there is not problem. But a child comes with seriously ill and not give them proper counseling they may think the patient died due to doctors negligence on the other hand if proper counseling and treatment is given even a second opinion should be taken from another physician. Then patient relatives may be satisfy because as a physician can treat scientifically and with devotion and pray to Almighty for relief. I hope my doctors and the doctor who are coming in this profession may follow my advice.

3. The next verse of the oath is that, I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor will I perform any abortion any operation for a criminal purpose. The duty of a physician is to save life from birth to the last minute of the life, not destruction.
4. "In the presence of epidemic or other danger I will not allow fear of personal harm to turn me from my duty" Physician should serve all human suffering and calamities, whether it be of natural or man made.

We the physicians have been gifted by the God with his power to serve human suffering, which he provided virtually to none in the universe. Based on this feelings an idea. I and some like minded people attempted to do something, built-up an organization, Shishu Sasthya Foundation" This organization beside health care services in the hospital and community, also provides Micro-finance among rural women, education for women and

children, vocational training centre to child and rendering health services to five hundred thousand people for the last 18 years. When I look back of these activities at a time, I feel pain and guilty that I could serve more if I had started it earlier in my life. This figure will be many times more by now.

Now I humbly request all of you to start something for the peoples welfare in your own locally(Village or town), it may look small today but you know a big tree comes from a tiny seed. Please put the seed today and the people of Bangladesh is waiting for you.

5. “What ever I see or hear in the lives of men, which ought not to be spoken or not be published that, I will keep secret” Every physician must keep the patient’s life secret, he should be a trusted friend. My fellow colleagues, you all have to earn your reputation through your own activity and dealings.
6. For young doctors let me tell you one very important thing of your professional life. Your real life has just started after your passing the final examination. This is time to earn and gather more pebbles of knowledge. Medical science is an ever-expanding universe, everyday it is discarding the old and some new are added. Yesterday’s information has been made obsolete by today and today’s one might have the same faith by tomorrow. To add newer information you should not have to wait for the text book and journal, please run through computer technology and internet. You all must be computer literate
7. My young friends I have my faith on you. I am sure, you can give significant boost to the health situation in this country. Life is a really a race, I want to hand it over to you. You can definitely make better Bangladesh. Our failures and shortcoming should not touch you and let your heart and soul be pure with divine sprit.

At the end , let me quote a writing from the Epitaph of the great scholar & saint Imam Gazali(R:)

“Maan tazzub mcccunum/cherer doctura/wali-e-khuda/meshawaat”

Translation:

*“I get wonder
I get wonder
Times and again
Why should not a doctor
Be the saint of Allah(Creator)”*

Physician oath attached here with.