

## EDITORIAL

### A CASE FOR THE PATIENTS

The fundamentals of patient's rights are derived from the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', which enshrines the concept of human dignity<sup>1</sup>. First and the foremost right, which a health provider owes to the patient is affirmation of his dignity and respect<sup>2,3</sup>. A patient deserves respect irrespective of his/her age, sex, religion, colour, caste or the disease he is suffering from. All other patient's rights, such as those related to information, consent, privacy, treatment and terminal care, arise only after we recognize this basic right.

Newer ethical issues that have emerged in the wake of advances in medical technologies, such as stem cell research, cloning, transplantation and genomic medicine, are all based on the fundamental right of the patient related to his respect and dignity<sup>4</sup>.

Patient's rights and physicians responsibilities are the two sides of a same coin. Overwhelmed by rapid advances in medical technology and overburdened by the patients' load, the health providers are generally perceived to have become mechanical and materialistic<sup>5</sup>. The patient, on the other hand, is often considered to have been reduced to a dehumanized entity. The doctors are blamed to treat cases, not the patients; and the cases are just numbers waiting in line to convey their complaints. The physician, with an impassive attitude, looks unapproachable to the patient, in spite of being with him/her one on one. Lack of empathy on the part of physician results in poor communication with the patient<sup>6</sup>.

Patient or an ailing human being needs attention, in a respectful and dignified manner, not only from the doctor but also from the members of the society and the state. Any lapse from the latter two may be overlooked on account of ignorance and lack of resources. But

for a doctor it is a primary duty and an unpardonable omission. Patient is a mean of livelihood, a source of professional satisfaction and a resource of learning for the doctor. The least a patient deserves in return is dignity and respect.

Providing the patients their basic right does not need any complicated legislation, any support from the government or any funding from the non government organizations. Only thing required is the cognizance of the fact that the respect and dignity of our profession, hinges on the respect and dignity we give to our patients.

The case for the dignity and respect of the patient was aptly presented by Sir Robert Hutchison (1871-1960) in his famous petition to God, which still remains relevant and is worth visiting again and again.

*"From inability to let well alone; from too much zeal for the new and contempt for what is old; from putting knowledge before wisdom and science before art and cleverness before common sense; from treating patients as cases; and from making the cure of disease more grievous than the endurance of the same, Good Lord, deliver us"<sup>7</sup>.*

### REFERENCES

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