

Medicos' suicides: Reasons and solutions



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In the past five years, 119 medical students committed suicide, the National Medical Commission said recently, adding that 1,166 students dropped out of medical education half-way.

On the one hand, there are students who end their lives out of frustration of not getting admissions in medical colleges. On the other, even those who have got seats and are pursuing medical education take the extreme step.

Studies have shown that the suicide syndrome has increased not only among medical students but also among doctors. Overload of work triggered by the recent changes in the medical sector, non-stop work and departmental pressures are attributed to the doctors' suicides.

The reasons for the medical students' suicides can be categorized into three: 1. Changes in personal nature of students 2. Changes in the medical education. 3. Changes happening in the medical sector.

Changes in personal nature of students

After the introduction of NEET, the students have to prepare for the Plus-Two exams as well as for NEET right from their class 9. Therefore, their day-to-day lifestyle is marked by exam pressures and aspirations. As the parents do not allow them to deal with problems other than those pertaining to exams, the students lose their ability of keen thinking and functioning independently.

The students thus prepared are left living away from parents when they join medical colleges where they are forced to face challenges and problems. As they for the first time in life are confronted with these challenges and problems, they find themselves struggling and fumbling; lose balance, become sensitive and intolerant to the point of deciding to commit suicide.

Besides, as they are, of late, getting more selfish and intolerant, they are unable to make friends with their fellow human beings. As a result, they get alienated and don't get personal consultations from others over their issues. In most cases, they take the extreme step in a huff.

Changes in education

Lot of major changes happened in medical education in the past decade. The number of seats has increased as private medical colleges have mushroomed all over the country. Corporate hospitals have also increased in number. Job opportunities for MBBS graduates have become less and so they are forced to pursue PG.

As the PG medical education has become compulsory, the students' enthusiasm for and involvement with the

undergraduate medical education has started decreasing. Right from the first year of MBBS course, they start preparing for the entrance exam for the PG courses. So, the college life too has become complicated and complex for them. Most students, even if staying in hostels, feel lonely.

The values of basic medical knowledge, ethics and morality have lost their appeal to the medical students. So, no wonder, they have cultivated an outlook towards diseases and patients merely as money-spinners. At one point of time, they feel bored with their education and mentally disturbed. The feelings of alienation and mental instability get reflected in their activities. Neither the medical education institutions nor the parents take trouble to understand their problems. Consequently, the medicos decide to walk out on medical education or end life.

Changes in medical sector

Today the medical sector has changed from the state of 'service' to that of 'commerce.' Both hospitals and patients have understood the commercialization of the medical service. But the doctors caught in between are struggling a lot.

After consumer laws are made applicable to the medical sector too, there have been changes in the way the hospitals approach the patients. It has become the primary duty of the hospitals to safeguard themselves from probable legal wrangles and setbacks. As a result, unnecessary lab tests and complicated procedures have become mandatory for the patients. This entails pressures from the hospitals on the doctors.

Besides, most hospitals have been depending on insurance in the past decade. Even in the government hospitals, medical insurance has become compulsory and therefore, the doctors are fixed insurance-related targets. Thus, the doctors have been forced to work like managers as they are burdened with insurance-related work apart from their regular job of providing clinical treatment

to patients. The doctors have to always think of achieving insurance targets.

All these features have completed commercialization of the medical sector. The doctors who are unable to come to terms with this trend cannot function independently. So, they are mentally affected to the point of their mental disturbance badly reflecting on their familial relationships.

The solutions

The preparations for the medical entrance exam keep the students in their teens seamlessly disturbed. Parents for their part mount pressures on them to crack the exam, accentuating the weakening of the students' mental health.

It must be ensured that the education system is hassle-free and simple in sync with the teenage students' mental state.

The parents should stop viewing their wards just as machines manufacturing marks. They must train their sons and daughters in such a way that the youngsters are mentally strong enough to deal with practical problems and issues, thinking independently.

Human values and life ethics must be instilled in the minds of the young apart from teaching them to score good marks in exams. The parents and teachers must be role models to them. Medical education must be changed into a system that does not mount entrance exam-related pressures on the students. The undergraduate medical course must be designed in such a way that the students naturally cultivate an outlook marked by mercy and humanism towards the patients, upholding the ethics of the profession.

The government must regulate the mushrooming number of seats in the medical colleges and design ethical codes and values to be complied with by the big corporate hospitals. The government hospitals must change their dependence on medical insurance.

Only when the medical sector again holds aloft the sublime values of service, it will become a system beneficial to patients, doctors and medical students. Then all problems will instantly be solved amicably.

Translated by V. Mariappan