

Violence against doctors in government hospitals and the role of media

Madam, Pakistan, at present, is undergoing a period of turmoil due to tremendous economic and political instability. Poverty, unemployment and political disruption have conjured up frustration, anger and impatience in a common man, inevitably leading to higher rates of crime and violence in the country. Medical personnel are amongst the highly vulnerable faction being increasingly subjected to violence by patients, particularly in government hospitals. A recent survey showed that 77% of physicians have faced either verbal or physical abuse in Pakistan.¹

Rise in the trend of influential political parties has produced high proportion of people seeking affiliation with them. Hence, it is not difficult for people with such contacts multiple unavoidable complications which either one can undergo during delivery.

Pakistan's health budget has decreased considerably resulting in lack of medical facilities, which makes the doctors' job even more daunting. To make news more sensational, the media is keen to display only one perspective of the story by relentlessly accusing the doctor and administration of maltreating the patient. In contrast, relatively less interest has been observed in appreciating a doctor who ends up saving a patient's life when all hopes have been lost.

Condemnation of unjustified physical assault on doctors is supported by a policy issued by the United Kingdom government that focuses on aggression against instigators and promotion of a respectable environment.² Unfortunately, our government hospitals lack a setup to deal with such disputes meaningfully. Doctors' performances should be constantly monitored to inculcate a sense of accountability and patients should be provided with the liberty to lodge complaints and air any dissatisfaction encountered during their hospital stay.

Irrefutably, corruption has woven its way deeply into our governmental setups. Doctors and institutions that have fallen prey to it should be exposed but not at the cost of jeopardizing those who strive hard to provide the best they can for their ailing patients. The media should try to uproot this vice instead of blaming doctors who themselves are often victims of higher leadership. Their lives are sometimes threatened and they are compelled to indulge in

to intimidate or even attack a physician and resort to media coverage in the advent of an adversity to their patient. Vast advances in technology during the last decade have authorized the media with a significant role in portraying such issues and shaping the audience's perception. Multiple cases have been reported as outcomes of "doctor's negligence", many a times failing to narrate a doctor's perspective on the events. Violence is particularly seen in emergency departments where patients are brought under such critical situations that sustaining their lives becomes impossible. The gynaecology department is another suggestive example where the doctor is imparted full blame of either mother's or child's demise irrespective of the corrupt activities reluctantly. This is amongst the many reasons why young medical graduates would prefer to pursue their medical careers abroad as the fear of encountering such events hampers their potential to perform. A study showed that physicians witnessing such events complained of depression, flashbacks, inability to sleep and frequent absences.³

Media is a powerful weapon which should report responsibility and without bias. Unless quick interventions are taken to provide adequate support and security, we will keep on losing quality doctors from our country.

Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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