

## Media and the Medical Profession should not cross their limits

They must learn to respect each other

By Shaukat Ali Jawaid

The recent unfortunate incidents at some of the healthcare facilities in Pakistan which has brought the media and the medical profession in direct confrontation is not in their interest and both sides needs to look into its long term consequences. Saner elements on both sides must sit down and negotiate some working relationship upholding the professional ethics. While professional negligence on the part of healthcare professionals, if any, should not be condoned under any circumstances, must be properly investigated and appropriate measures taken to ensure such incidents do not occur again but to highlight every death taking place in the hospitals as negligence on the part of the doctors, which at times the media has been portraying cannot be appreciated. It is this attitude which has forced the medical profession in general and the young doctors in particular who work under very difficult circumstances and highly uncomfortable environment that they have resorted to agitation.

The recent malicious campaign against the medical profession in the media particularly by the electronic

media has not done any good to the public as it is the patients which continue to suffer. Many a times now the doctors are reluctant to handle serious cases which are referred to big tertiary healthcare facilities where too the doctors are seldom prepared to take chance. As such many patients which could have been helped are now deprived of such facilities.

To err is human and we are all human beings, members of the medical profession being no exception. There is no denying the fact that at times there are cases of professional negligence but we must remember that even doctors themselves and their kith and kin also die and they cannot save them. Despite numerous advances in medicine, still there are certain limitations and death cannot be prevented. Every case is not a straight forward diagnosis. At times looking at the patients symptoms, differential diagnosis has also to be looked into. Not only that even in certain difficult to diagnose and treat cases, it is the diagnosis by exclusion which may take some days or weeks to arrive at correct diagnosis before appropriate treatment can be initiated. Again some of the conditions are still known as syndromes as the profession has not been able to label them. So to say that the doctors could not diagnose a certain patient immediately is asking for too much which is not humanly possible, feasible and practical. Patient safety should be every one's concern and first priority, hence to ensure that every healthcare facility must form a Committee which should address all complaints from the patients and their attendants. All such complaints should be properly investigated and if professional negligence is established, appropriate action against the concerned healthcare professional must be initiated.

In order to avoid any such unpleasant incident that occurred at Jinnah Hospital Lahore, it is important that some guidelines are formulated for the media as well. Firstly the media personnel must take permission from the institution head before initiating any coverage from within the institution, hospital campus. Secondly all hospitals, medical institutions should have official spokesperson that should talk to the media and answers their questions if any and also provide them the details which they are interested. If such a mechanism is put in place, it will eliminate the possibilities of any wrong information being passed on to the media or different people giving different versions of any particular incident. It is also unethical to prepare a video without the consent of the party concerned.

Any one visiting a hospital to seek medical care, help and assistance should also behave like a patient even if he or she happens to be professional representing different sections of the society including the media. They should not demand VIP treatment as a right. However, if they wish to get some special attention, it is also possible provided they go through the institution head or hospital's official spokesman. Doctors are most often very receptive and media personnel usually get immediate attention in most of the cases. However, at times the healthcare facilities and the administration may have some limitations which should also be appreciated by all those concerned.

Another point which is extremely important is the fact that a vast majority of those in the media covering health does not have any medical background. Hence, at times it is not possible for them to follow the cases, stories in its true perspective. Often there is a chance of them being

misled by some vested interests. As such it is in their own interest that they attend some workshops, courses on basics in health reporting. Medical universities, medical colleges, tertiary healthcare facilities all can arrange such short courses for the benefit of representatives of the media but all this is possible only if the representatives of the media are themselves interested in learning and keeping themselves update. Some of the well known professionals in the print as well as electronic media who enjoy tremendous respect are not only highly educated and competent but they also keep themselves update by availing every learning opportunity which they come across. This is something which is lacking in some sections of our print as well as electronic media. Continued Professional Development is extremely important for every professional and it is all the more important for healthcare professionals and representatives of the media. While the doctors have to deal with human lives, media has to create awareness on various health issues as well as educate the public. Hence, if the media personnel are themselves not capable of making an objective assessment of any situation, there is always a chance that they can be misled by people who have their own vested interests.

While professionalism has not yet come among those in the media who cover health though there are certain exceptions, professionalism is also lacking among the younger generation of doctors. Since a vast majority of them work for long hours, are meagerly paid, have to work in highly uncomfortable environment, they are bound to get agitated when they see them being dragged into un-necessary controversies. There have been numerous studies that long

working hours adversely affect the performance of the young doctors. If the authorities could take care of their economic needs, provide them comfortable working environment, they can be expected to work with devotion and dedication, concentrating on their duties. However, if they have to worry about their future, job security all the time, one should not expect miracles. Doctors are also a part of the society which has good and not so good people. This does not mean that the doctor's community as a whole should be maligned.

Millions of patients are taken care of at public healthcare facilities all over the country every day, a vast majority of them get well but the media has seldom highlighted the positive image of these institutions or praised the healthcare professionals who at times go beyond the call of their duty to save human lives. On the contrary any mishap is highlighted in such a manner that it is highly demoralizing for the entire medical profession. The successive governments have failed to ensure any meaningful improvement in health infrastructure, there is no appropriate expansion in health services, facilities due to limited health allocations. It is the doctors who have to face the public not the health planners or the politicians who are responsible for much of the current state of affairs. There is no dearth of God fearing, kind hearted conscious healthcare professionals who practice ethical medicine and always try to uphold professional ethics. Similarly there is no dearth of good people among the bureaucracy and so is the case in the media. Hence, all of them should sit together and try to formulate a code of conduct for themselves. The doctors have had enough and now indications are that they are no

longer prepared to take any insult. They seem to be determined to take on anyone who crosses the limits. The continued tension and strained relations between these two important professions is in no one's interest. There should be no winners and no losers. Every thing can be amicably sorted out provided every one is sincere and patient safety is their main concern.

*(April 15, 2010)*

## Psycho trauma, Media and the Medical Profession:

*A communication from Prof. Mowadat H. Rana*

Thank you very much for your elaborate coverage of the *Karwan-e-Hayat* Conference organized in the memory of Late Prof Zaki Hassan. I have always been touched and impressed by your sensitivity towards mental health as a discipline in Pakistan. Your paper has consistently pursued themes related to this often ignored medical discipline. May I take this opportunity to pay rich tributes to you and indeed through this to Dr. Maqbool H Jaffary for your efforts to promote medical journalism and the cause of mental health in Pakistan.

I will also take this opportunity to refer to your coverage of my state of the art lecture on Psycho trauma at the Conference. I am distressed to note that as a journalist and a champion of independence of media well known in the medical fraternity for expressing viewpoints without holding any reservations and boundaries, you have reacted so much to my pointing out the role played by certain anchorpersons of some channels in particular, in perpetuating hopelessness and psycho trauma in the country. I am sure you would also grant me the right to hold and express

my views on the subject candidly and openly without fear, the same way that you grant these rights to the media, its anchorpersons and the journalists. I think a journalist of your stature and standing could have taken the criticism of media in stride and in the same spirit as you very rightly consider it to be the democratic right of media to criticize others.

As to the issue of you not getting an opportunity to ask questions, I am sure it was in the heat of the moment when you were writing those lines that you forgot that state of the art lectures are not followed by any question and answer sessions. I am sure you remember that none of the state of the art lectures delivered in the same session were followed by question and answer sessions. My lecture was thus not an exception. Indeed you did come up to the stage at the end of the session to meet me in person and highlight your viewpoint vehemently and passionately in a state of deep anger and distress. While I shall jealously protect my right of speech to express my views at a scientific forum, I feel sad to read and (indeed see) you hurt. I expect you to take the criticism of your profession i.e. journalism and media with the same grace as we in the medical profession take yours.

I hope to meet you in Quetta at the International Psychiatric Conference and we could debate the issue of tolerance of criticism of the current trends in journalism and the dark side of media moguls in our society.

I am sure as a conscientious and an upright journalist of excellent repute you will yourself launch a campaign on the

negative role and the damage that such a powerful medium can inflict, if left unbridled and unchallenged. May I recommend that you should take a lead in profusely writing about the '*black sheep*' in your community, particularly amongst the anchorpersons, and expose the "*lafafa culture*" in media, the lifestyle and the palatial farmhouses in which some of our anchorpersons live in Islamabad and Dubai. I will be very happy to take you around to some of these "resorts" next time that you visit the Capital. On another note, may I also propose to organize a one day workshop in collaboration with Pulse International at our Centre for Trauma Research and Psychosocial Interventions to highlight the positive role that media can play in the coverage of traumatic events and disasters. We will be delighted to provide the requisite data, guidelines, evidence base and training modules to representatives of print and electronic media. There are internationally accepted ethical guidelines on the subject and we at CTRPI will be very happy to assist you if you take the initiative in mobilizing a movement to help media to become an important resource and support for the survivors of psycho trauma. This indeed will be another feather in your already illustrious cap. I shall keenly look forward to hear from you.

*Prof. Mowadat H. Rana*

*E-mail: mhrana786@gmail.com*

*Response from the Chief Editor*  
*Shaukat Ali Jawaid*

A good clinician is expected to excel in clinical skills as good history taking and comprehensive physical examination is of vital importance to come at correct diagnosis. Unless the causative factors are taken care of, treatment of symptoms is not going to result in cure.

Our dear friend and respected reader Prof. Mowadat H. Rana is just looking at the symptoms and wants to cure them. He is not alone who holds these views. In fact some other healthcare professionals also have similar feelings and it is often discussed. It did come under discussion in a Karachi Bioethics Group meeting as well. To me this is a very sensitive issue which needs to be debated and discussed in detail at appropriate forum where all the stakeholders are present. I do agree that people in the media need to be educated that they should not repeatedly show the images which can result in psycho trauma on the viewers but this does not mean that media can be ordered not to expose the truth and show the mirror. My only concern is that Prof. Mowadat Rana should not have criticized by name both the respected anchorpersons Mr. Talat Hussain of Aaj TV and Mr. Hamid Mir of Geo TV in a meeting where they were not present to defend themselves. It is also not true that media in USA does not show and print such images. I am sure he must have seen the cover stories of Newsweek which exposed the atrocities of occupying forces in Iraq with images and stories which some TV channels carried with frightening images. I neither personally know

both these anchor persons nor have I ever met them but I will have no hesitation to nominate both these personalities for the highest Media Award in recognition of their services to expose truth during the last three years often at the risk of their personal life. I remember once before showing these images of terrorist attacks Mr. Talat Hussain made an announcement on Aaj TV that children should be kept away from the TV screens as they were going to show some images which might adversely affect them psychologically.

The problem is that the media is keeping the Nation informed. When the authorities announce that so many terrorists were killed in operation against ongoing war on terror, the next day the TV channels show the mutilated bodies of four to six years old children and women who have died in such attacks which is not at all palatable for the authorities.

Who is a terrorist is also not yet clear. A careful look at history will reveal that once George Washington was termed as terrorist and then he became President of United States of America. Nelson Mandela was also declared terrorist and spent a major part of his life in prison but later he not only became President of South Africa but was also honoured with Nobel Peace Prize. Resistance against foreign occupation is considered legitimate and that is what we are seeing in Iraq and Afghanistan. These freedom fighters cannot be termed as terrorists. We in Pakistan had never heard of suicide bombers till few years ago. What we see these days is the reaction of some actions. It is the result of wrong policies by our military ruler General Pervez

Musharraf. Prof. Mowadat Rana and his colleagues must be aware of the fact that thousands of persons have gone missing during the last four years ( a few of them were traced thanks to actions taken by deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry), many of them were sold to America for millions of dollars and where these dollars have gone is not known. What about the psycho trauma of their kith and kin, relatives and how their family members are passing their days. When students of *Lal Masjid* were being burnt alive with Phosphorous Bombs (remember live TV interview of late Lt. Gen. Jamshed Gulzar Keyani), every body knew that it will have serious repercussions. The problem could have been sorted out by using minimum force and adopting a better strategy. Political problems need political solutions and use of force has always proved counter productive. Let us all join hands to ensure that we have rule of law in the country; justice is available to all which is only possible when we have free and independent judiciary. Let us ensure that no military dictator in future has the courage to dismiss honourable Judges of the superior judiciary and keep them house arrest with their family members. When there is no justice in the country, it gives rise to desperation, frustration, hopelessness and helplessness. When the whole family members of some one is killed, for him it is the end of the world and these are the ones who then become suicide bombers and their acts take many innocent lives which cannot be condoned and must be condemned. But we must remember that these are reactions of some actions. Until such time that we change our policy, we cannot overcome these suicide attacks. The effects of showing images on the TV screens resulting in psycho trauma

come much later. Those who wish to highlight these side issues are perhaps helping to maintain the status quo and trying to side track the real issues. Every NATO missile attack in Pakistani Tribal areas which kills innocent civilians also produces a fresh breed of suicide bombers for which Pakistan continues to pay a heavy price. Why should not we force the authorities for a qualitative change in their policy, stop listening and following the dictates of super powers? Instead they must take their own people into confidence. TV channels and their anchorpersons are showing the mirror. If the situation is ugly, how can they make it bright? In 1970s, we did not have independent media and the Nation was fed on lies with the result that we lost half the country East Pakistan.

I have no sympathy with those in the media who are involved in "*Lafafa Culture*" and they must be exposed. But let me assure our friend Prof. Mowadat Rana that those who indulge in such unethical practices are always found sitting in the lap of the rulers and do not work independently. I have my doubts whether Mr. Talat Hussain or Hamid Mir own any Farm House in Islamabad or Dubai. However, I will request them to invite Prof. Mowadat Rana in their live talk shows where he can present his viewpoint and get answer to his allegations against them. I also present myself for accountability. Throughout my professional career of forty two years I have had transparent dealings with the Pharma industry and the medical profession. I have always tried to uphold professional ethics, safeguarding my professional integrity and credibility. In this process I did lose some of my best friends but for me protecting professional integrity and credibility is much more impor-

tant than friendship. The vigilant media with the help of conscious members of the civil society will continue to perform its duty of keeping the Nation informed and let the people make their own decisions whether they wish to know the truth or not. This is for the first time in the history of Pakistan that people show more interest in these talk shows rather than Dramas, hence they are better informed.

As regards holding a workshop for media persons on Psycho Trauma, we will be too glad to be a part of this activity. Let the CTRPI organize this inviting the media persons including the anchorpersons on the TV channels to discuss all these issues. After listening to each other's viewpoint, we might come to some useful conclusions.

*(November 15, 2008)*