



Temple of Faith and Hope



Prof AK Rai

The mellow music of temple bells, maulavi saab's 'azaan' calling the faithful for worship, and the sweet melody of gurbani! As I pen this preface, few sounds could be more solemnly sweet than this. Several thoughts cross my mind, but this surely must be providence that these notes of faith happen to be my companions at this hour. A physician must carry the same devotion, commitment, piety, humility and sobriety while attending to his job. Only if he does so, would he deserve the eulogy the old school reserved for him.

The Prayer

A hospital is just like a temple. A shrine of faith and hope, where people of all ages, of all creeds, of all beliefs, come to find succor. This is particularly true for a medical institution which carries a people-centric philosophy and is of the magnitude of Safdarjung Hospital. A common man's hospital, where no patient has to think if they can afford the treatment, where most services are delivered free of cost or at extremely low cost to the patient, where

no patient is turned back for the lack of beds, and where no difference exists whether a patient has less means or more, the hospital has had a steadily increasing footfall from the day it began to function (Table 1).

The hospital today attends to over 8,000 outpatients a day, offers round-the-clock accident and emergency services, and nurses more than 2,000 patients in its overworked wards. If numbers can be a pointer, the hospital has since 1960 chronicled a near nine-fold increase in the number of annual outpatient footfall and a similar growth in its annual inpatient admission numbers. In the year that just went by, the hospital attended to nearly 3 million outpatients, admitted more than 1,50,000 patients and carried out over 26,000 deliveries. These numbers narrate a story, and are surely a most satisfying exposition of people’s faith and hope in the healthcare we provide.

Notwithstanding this endeavor, we still have miles and miles to go. To be more patient-friendly, the outdated physical structure of the hospital needs a major rebuilding and reorganization, but equally, the physicians, nurses and paramedics must solemnly affirm to be true to their commitment, caring of their patients, and strong not to yield to the evils of complacency, mediocrity and greed.

The religion is universal, and the prayer is best enunciated in the Upanishads, which extol:



The Virtues

The pleasures, regrets, reveries, changing skies of the social order notwithstanding, we must recognize that the divinity of the profession lies in freeing people of their pain, suffering and sorrow and in seeing them smile again. This embodies the essence of the profession we have chosen, and what we must practice. Let us be

Patient Care Statistics Safdarjung Hospital 1950–2015

Table 1

Year	Number of Beds	Annual Outpatient Attendance	Annual Number of Inpatient Admissions	Annual Number of Deliveries	Annual Number of Emergencies
1955	204	1,78,590	5,743	*	*
1960	666	3,30,015	18,427	*	*
1965	1,142	5,47,638	47,964	5,797	*
1970	1,207	7,14,433	60,353	7,659	*
1975	1,207	11,26,684	72,645	8,945	*
1980	1,207	10,16,466	66,181	9,035	*
1985	1,207	12,44,207	74,102	12,485	1,43,850
1990	1,357	10,78,767	72,366	14,104	1,70,634
1995	1,531	14,95,223	82,638	16,302	2,04,554
2000	1,531	18,55,713	97,402	19,967	2,51,836
2005	1,531	19,36,245	1,14,704	22,135	2,95,988
2010	1,531	21,68,634	1,24,832	25,439	2,82,055
2015	1,531	28,42,422	1,58,331	26,173	3,58,045

Source: Agarwal VC, Devi Satya V. Medical Records Department. *Data for the years is not available.

compassionate and caring to those who make us feel good; it is they who make our souls blossom.

Some years ago, the celebrated Anglo-American poet, WH Auden, had this to say about those who practice medicine: "A doctor, like anyone else who has to deal with human beings, each of them unique, cannot be a scientist; he is either, like the surgeon, a craftsman, or, like the physician and the psychologist, an artist. . . . This means that in order to be a good doctor a man must also have a good character, that is to say, whatever weaknesses and foibles he may have, he must love his fellow human beings in the concrete and desire their good before his own." If you can come true to these thoughts, you would amass the riches no one can match.

The Quest

The wise have said, things that have come into being change continually. So must medicine. The real community of man . . . is the community of those who seek the truth. So must you. To these elementaries, append the thoughts of Benjamin Franklin, who wrote: "Be studious in your profession, and you will be learned. Be industrious and frugal, and you will be rich. Be sober and temperate, and you will be healthy. Be in general virtuous, and you

will be happy. At least you will, by such conduct, stand the best chance for such consequences."

The Eleventh Commandment

Science knows only one commandment—contribute to science. Think, examine, explore, dwell, and experiment, and who knows, you may make yourself and the institution proud by walking where none others have walked. To give birth to an idea, to discover a great thought, is an intellectual nugget no gold can buy! Let your brain-plough be at work. Modern history records that we have contributed very little in the recent years to the ocean of knowledge in the medical sciences. It is time to return to the old ways. This is the land of Dhanvantri, Devodas (of Benaras), Sushruta, Charaka, Jeevaka, Vagbhata, and others who embodied the same seminal tradition, whose observations and thought have stood the test of time in many spheres of knowledge in medical sciences.

The temple bells must ring within, the azaan must be the call from within, and the goodness of gurbani must flood and fill us from within, if we have to find the bliss we seek. Though their notes may change with the years and moods of life, the essence shall not.

