

Medical Ethics in Ancient India

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PRECEPTS FOR NEW MEDICAL GRADUATES

The *Kasyapa-Samhita* lays down the following precepts for the guidance of new medical graduates:

The physician should wear clean white dress; dress his hair and tie it in a knot. When walking on the road, he must look ahead, far and wide, on all sides and proceed forward. When he meets others or others meet him, he must accost them first. He must be friendly to all. He should not visit the patient's residence uninvited. In the patient's house, he should look at none else, except the patient; should not cut jokes with the maid-servants and with other women in the house; should not refer to their names discourteously; should not talk too much with them on any subject, and should not exhibit excessive affection for them. He should not talk to them or sit by their side in private; should not go to the house of the patient without giving previous intimation; should not reveal the secrets of the household nor exaggerate the bad qualities of the family. When unfavourable or serious symptoms appear in the patient, he should not inform the patient. He should not attempt treatment of a patient whose death is certain or a patient who has an incurable disease or a patient who has not got the necessary facilities for the treatment. He should carefully observe and know various details about the body, age, disease, medicine, etc., and should carry with him all drugs essential for the treatment. He should not have any enmity with other medical colleagues; and may consult them and decide the treatment. If some envious opponents criticise his procedure, he must convince and win them over by his knowledge and experience. He should always speak clearly without ambiguity and doubts, sweetly and ingeniously in a simple and ethical tone, avoiding controversies and according to the law of *Dharma*.

In this manner, the physician who desires the good and welfare of the world, lives a life of righteous conduct and attains happiness, both in this world and in the next.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND QUALITIES OF A GOOD PHYSICIAN

The *Kalyana Karaka* lays down the code of conduct a physician should observe and enumerates the qualities a good physician should have as follows:

The physician should not undertake treatment on account of lust, love or greed; not even friendship, enmity or affection for a kinsman should be

the reason for treatment; the expectation of earning a reward or fame should not tempt a physician to give treatment. Only one urge and aim, kindness or mercy, i.e., humanitarian feeling should lead the physician to practise the art of healing.

The physician should never think that the practice of medicine yields no benefit to him. Sometimes he may get money; sometimes he may get what he desires; occasionally, he may win fame or friendship; even when he does not obtain any one of these, there is bound to be at least the benefit of practical experience.

Will the earth be without human beings? Can human beings live without drink, food and all sorts of activities? And can such people be completely free from ill health and diseases? Therefore, the physician need never dread unemployment or starvation.

The physician who undertakes treatment should have the following qualities :

He must be a speaker of truth, a man of courage, endowed with patience, blessed with a lucky hand that has achieved numerous cures, one who has witnessed and also practised notable methods of treatment, one who does not get upset under any adverse circumstances. These are the great and noble qualities that a physician entrusted with healing the sick should possess.

The patient, the physician, the medicine and the nurse are the four limbs of treatment. The physician is more important than the other three. He is the basis or prime cause for the rest. There is not much harm or danger if the patient loses faith in his wife or children but if the patient loses faith in the physician, there is no hope of cure for the patient.

Profound study as well as understanding of the sciences and practical skill in administering medicines, achieve success in treatment. If either of these, is lacking or absent, the life of the patient is in doubt or danger. So, only a physician who is equally proficient in theory and practice and is wise and has secured the permission of the King (or State authorities) should undertake treatment of the sick.

When an ignorant physician, without adequate knowledge of sciences, tempted by greed or lust begins to treat the sick, he will be sacrificing the lives of people and become liable for punishment by the ruler (or Government). Hence, the physician should be careful to avoid such predicaments, leading to punishments.

REFERENCES

Kalyana Karaka, 1940, Shoalapur, p. 113.

Kasyapa-Saṁhitā, 1953, Choukhamba Sanskrit Series, Banarās, p. 60.