

Reaching out for Ethical Healthcare

Editorial

Dear ADEH members,

Welcome to the first ADEH newsletter for 2019. These are trying times for healthcare in India. During our interactions with doctors across the country, quite a few doctors confess to feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with the hostility they face from patients and their families in case something goes wrong. On the other hand, the onslaught of commercialization and a corrupt system that forces them to play by the rules leaves many doctors questioning their choice to practice this profession, especially in circumstances where they have to go against their conscience.

When people ask me about the purpose of the ADEH, I like to quote the following lines from Bertolt Brecht,

In the dark times,
will there also be singing?
Yes, there will be singing
About the dark times.

As we look back at 2018, we can't help but notice that all members of ADEH are actively involved in creating awareness about the perils of commercialization of the medical profession and the urgent need for a radical reorganization of the private healthcare sector in India. Be it through writing books or newspaper articles about irregularities in our profession and government policy, publishing research papers, advocacy efforts with policy makers, inviting debate and dialogue with the medical community in regional meetings and conferences, we all are singing about the dark times, in the hope and the belief that people will eventually listen and get together to bring about the change we so desperately want to see.

Our feature article in this issue is an interview with the illustrious authors of the book, "Healers or Predators", co-edited with by Dr Samiran Nundy and Dr Sanjay Nagral with Keshav Desiraju, former union health secretary. Dr Samiran Nundy and Dr Sanjay Nagral are well known for their active contribution to ethical medicine in India and their efforts to highlight the fallout of corporatization of healthcare. They are also amongst the founding members of the ADEH. Their book details the corrupt practices in every sector of the medical profession and analyses the reasons for such an abysmal state of affairs. It also puts forward solutions to solve this dysfunction in healthcare.

The upcoming elections are also an opportunity for us to generate public opinion and support for radical reforms to fix our healthcare system and to engage with political leadership regarding healthcare issues that ought to be on their agenda. It was with this intention in mind that we have come out with the first draft of the Ethical Doctors Manifesto in December 2018. We hope you will write back to us with feedback and your suggestions which would help us to make this Manifesto a truly representative document.

Strong advocacy and ongoing sustained engagement with stakeholders is the only way to create critical consensus and demand for rational and affordable healthcare for all. In 2019, we look forward to being a part of a concerted effort from all of us at ADEH to make this happen.

Warm regards and best wishes for 2019,

Dr Arun Gadre & Dr. Kanchan Pawar

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Interview with Dr Samiran Nundy and Dr Sanjay Nagral



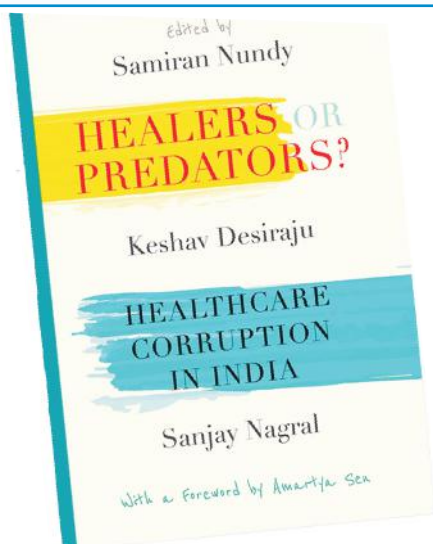
Dr Samiran Nundy is Emeritus Consultant, Gastroenterology & Liver Transplant, at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi. He is also a distinguished medical academic, writer and the former head of the department of gastrointestinal surgery at the

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. He is the founder editor of the *National Medical Journal of India and Tropical Gastroenterology*. The Government of India awarded him the fourth highest Indian civilian honour of Padma Shri in 1985.



Dr Sanjay Nagral currently serves as Senior Consultant and Director, Dept of Surgical Gastroenterology at Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre, Mumbai. He has around 50 publications in International & National Journals mainly on topics related to Hepatopancreatobiliary

Surgery. He has also extensively written in the print media with contributions to major newspapers. He is a founder member 'Forum for Medical Ethics' & is on the Editorial board of the "Indian Journal of Medical Ethics"



The book *Healers or Predators? Healthcare Corruption in India* was published by the Oxford University Press in June 2018. Coedited by Dr Samiran Nundy, Dr Sanjay Nagral and Keshav Desiraju, the book discusses how healers, in many cases, are shifting shape to becoming predators. Through analytical essays by some 50 contributors from within and outside the medical fraternity, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of the genesis and facets of the all pervasive corruption evident in the healthcare sector today ---from exorbitant billing by corporate hospitals to the non-merit-based selection in medical colleges to the questionable motives playing strong in the area of organ transplantation. But it is not only about the illness affecting the sector. It also offers solutions, and some stories of hope.

Q.1 What was the motivation for both of you to write this book?

S. Nundy: We all knew that there was corruption in healthcare in India but generally accepted this as being a reflection of the situation in other fields in this country. It was only when Dr. Berger, an Australian doctor working in Mussoorie wrote a piece in the BMJ on how widespread it was, did we decide that something should be done about it. So the three of us planned a book which would deal with all the different aspects of healthcare corruption in an 'unemotional' and academic manner. We hoped that this would stimulate action against this very unfair practice where a supposed caregiver who is in a position of power is taking advantage of a patient who is seeking his help.

S. Nagral: Even the most optimistic supporters of India's development story have to admit that its Healthcare system is in shambles. Along with the

unprecedented domination of a profit oriented private sector, some doctors like us were also troubled both by the conspiracy of silence surrounding corruption in healthcare and its impact on the cost and quality of care. Many of our colleagues dismiss it saying that it is just a reflection of societal corruption and not so widespread as the media would have you believe.

Q.2 What is the strength of "Healers or Predators"?

S. Nundy: The large number of contributors, many of whom are not doctors and the wide variety of subjects discussed.

S. Nagral: Until now, most of the discourse on this issue was restricted to journalistic exposes and opinion pieces. This book attempts to expand the scope of the debate and examines in detail the historical, structural, socio-political and cultural roots of this phenomenon.

Q.3 What has been the reaction to the book so far, in the past 6 months?

S. Nundy: It's been a best seller for Oxford University Press and has had six launches - Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai twice and there will be two more in February in Calicut and Trivandrum. Doctors are generally angry that such a book was published and we've been called traitors to the profession and unethical practitioners trying to divert attention from our own misdeeds.

S. Nagral: I am not sure how one assesses the response, but the book has sold a fair amount of copies both in print & kindle form. Also, it has been discussed a lot amongst medical circles (almost everyone knows the title at least!) but many colleagues haven't liked the idea of such a book whereas those outside the profession seem to welcome it.

My regret is that the book is a bit too big & hence a little intimidating to read.

Ethical Doctors' Manifesto

Launch of the Ethical Doctors manifesto:

The issue of Healthcare has gained momentum in the national discourse in the past 5 years as people have become aware that the government is doing little to make healthcare accessible and affordable to all. The launch of the ambitious Ayushman Bharat scheme to provide health coverage to the poorest of Indias citizens is a welcome move but there is a lot of scepticism regarding its design and implementation. Elsewhere, state governments like Kerala have

The Alliance of Doctors for Ethical Healthcare (ADEH) is a group of medical professionals from across India, who are committed to patient-centered rational healthcare. We have supported the capping of stent prices by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, made a submission to the Joint Parliamentary committee on the draft of National Medical Commission, opposed the irrational ban on the production of oxytocin in the private sector and also backed the proposal put forward by the Niti Aayog to cap the trade margins to 30% for all medical devices. Some of us have over the years been consistently writing/advocating/litigating on some of the issues which has resulted in some recent tangible change. We can claim partial credit for the MCI dissolution.

launched their own health coverage schemes. With the upcoming elections, it is imperative to draw the attention of people and political parties to the urgent need for overall socio-political reform and regulation in the health care sector.

Keeping the upcoming elections in mind, the ADEH team collaborated to come out with the Ethical Doctors Manifesto, which was launched with a press conference in New Delhi on 26th December 2018.

We have observed with some dismay:

1. The increasing commercialization of healthcare in this country, the failing public healthcare system, billions of dollars of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in corporate hospitals, diagnostic and radiology chains, the proliferation of private medical colleges, and the exorbitant fees charged by them and the huge trade margin in pharmaceutical/ device and implants' (price to the whole seller and Maximum Retail Price) have caused billions of patients in India major financial hardship.
2. There is an increasing societal unrest and anger against our once noble medical profession mainly due to this uncontrolled commercialization. In an overall atmosphere of intolerance, violence against



doctors is on the rise. Those of us who are trying to do ethical and rational practice are also becoming depressed by the current profiteering and unscrupulous environment that breeds malpractice, induces unnecessary investigative and operative procedures, the prevalence of 'cut' practice. This has damaged the faith and trust of the common man in the once revered medical profession.

3. The Medical Council of India (MCI) has failed in its rather feeble attempts to enforce ethics among private practitioners. The National Medical Commission that is proposed to replace MCI is a totally undemocratic structure and is no remedy to the existing MCI. It has not constituted a separate 'Board for Medical Ethics' and has not capped fees of 50% of the seats in private medical colleges at par with government medical colleges as proposed by ADEH. Furthermore, it has allowed for-profit entities to enter the field of medical education which will further add to corporatization of healthcare and medical education.
4. The recently launched National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS), as well as the programme for the provision of Comprehensive Primary Health Care

(CPHC) are based on faulty foundations. Apart from their low budgetary provision, there is every possibility that the majority of the government's expenditure on health care will be diverted to the high-end interventional procedures only available in medium and big hospitals. We believe that the government system lacks the will and organizational capacity to manage a programme of this scale. In the absence of a robust regulatory mechanism and mandatory standard treatment guidelines; we fear that the schemes will be misused by corporates and other big private hospitals for profiteering through indulging in unindicated procedures and surgeries. It will however give good business to the private sector and insurance companies.

Against this backdrop, we request that **all political parties should pledge in their upcoming election manifestos a commitment to bring in a system of Universal Health Care** by strengthening and expanding the public health system so that it will be the lead player of a rational, humane health care system in India. Regulation and reforms in the private sector are of paramount importance to ensure that rational and ethical healthcare is accessible to all citizens.

Our demands are that the government should:

1. Effectively implement Niti Aayog's proposal in the concept note released by it on 8th June 2018, to cap the trade margin up to 30% in case of all medical devices.
2. Form and use the Trust-Model as in Andhra Pradesh for procuring the services of private practitioners according to need on the principle of 'Standard Payment for Standard Care'. It should not use the American model which has been rejected by many countries, of using profit-driven insurance companies.
3. Ban the production of irrational medicines and irrational Fixed Dose Combinations of medicines, and give a directive to all pharmaceutical companies to market their medicines only under their generic names. (Company's name in the bracket)
4. Regulate Drug prices in line with the rationalization of trade margins in medical devices. The ex-factory cost of the drugs should be actual cost based.
5. Enact and implement the Appropriate Clinical Establishments Act in all states with the focus on having mandatory standard treatment guidelines in place and formulate a patients' rights charter.
6. Provide free medicines and investigations in all public hospitals on the lines of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Rajasthan
7. Pledge to increase the public expenditure on healthcare from 1.1% to 2.5% of GDP within the next four years and then increase it to 5% in subsequent five years.
8. We demand that the NMC should take action against 'Fake faculty' in private medical colleges and address falling standards of medical education, as well as to regulate tuition fees of 100% seats in private medical colleges.
9. We request that the National Medical Commission appoint two representatives from ADEH in its ethics committee to ensure observance of the science and ethics of medicine and to ensure that justice is done to the aggrieved patients and affected doctors.

ADEH Conferences and Meetings, September to December 2018

1. Dr Arun Gadre was invited by the Lown Institute, based in Boston, USA to give a talk on commercialization of healthcare in India on 26 October 2018.

The Lown institute is a health care think tank challenging high-cost, low-value care and advancing a vision for a new system, rooted in justice and caring and where all Americans can have the opportunity for Health. It provides health care activists a platform to present their ideas and supports them in their fight for Universal Health Care.

Click on the link below to read an interview about his experiences drawing attention to health care corruption, and uniting health care professionals against corruption and privatization and leading a movement for ethical and rational health care.

<https://lowninstitute.org/news/blog/fighting-health-care-privatization-and-corruption-in-india/>

2. **Joint 14th World Congress of Bioethics & 7th National Bioethics Conference, held at Bangalore on December 5-7, 2018**

Workshop organised by the ADEH: Impact of marketisation on ethical healthcare: Analysis and the way ahead.

Panelists: Dr Abhay Shukla, Dr Arun Gadre, Dr George Thomas, Dr Arun Mitra.

3. ADEH held its first ever meeting in Indore, Madhya Pradesh on the 15th of December, 2018. Organized by

Dr Sanjay Bhalerao, Paediatrician and ADEH Coordinator for Madhya Pradesh, the meeting had a sizeable turnout with many esteemed senior doctors from Indore and Bhopal attending and presenting their opinions on issues like bridging the trust deficit, improving doctor patient communication. There were also local media interviews that led to many enquiries about the ADEH.

4. The ADEH held a one-day core group meeting in New Delhi on the 26th of December 2018 to decide the future course of action for the ADEH for 2019. Key points decided in the meeting were:
 - To endorse Universal Health Care through a more visible campaign.
 - To publish position papers, highlighting grey areas in medicine that are used to create confusion and doubt in patients.
 - To increase membership base of ADEH amongst young doctors, by addressing issues such as assaults on doctors, taking the ADEH message to medical colleges.
 - To use relevant social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter to increase ADEH outreach and awareness about UHC.
 - To campaign for a transformation in medical education and create awareness about irregularities such as the issue of "ghost" faculty, capitation fees in private medical institutions.



Upcoming Events :

- ADEH Kerala has organized two programs in Calicut and Trivandrum in February 2019, featuring a panel discussion with the co- authors of the book, "Healers or Predators" along with other eminent

medical professionals and distinguished speakers. The program also includes the release of the Ethical Doctors Manifesto.

RELEASE OF ETHICAL DOCTORS HEALTH MANIFESTO FOR INDIA 2019
DISCUSSION ON THE BOOK "HEALERS OR PREDATORS"
HEALTH CARE CORRUPTION IN INDIA
Venue : PG Academic Hall, Govt Medical College Calicut
23/02/2019 SATURDAY, 2.30pm to 6pm

Speakers: Dr. V.R. Rajendran, Padmasri. Dr. Samiran Nundy, Dr. Arun Gadre, Dr. Saijy Nagral, Dr. K. Suresh Kumar, Dr. KP Aravindan, Dr. KV. Babu, Dr. V. Ashraf, Dr. Naban Das, Dr. T. Senthil Kumar, Dr. S. Suresh Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar.

Organised by: ALLIANCE OF DOCTORS FOR ETHICAL HEALTH CARE
Powered by: UNESCO BIO ETHICS CHAIR, KSSP, JSA, ETHICAL MEDICAL FORUM

HEALTH CARE CORRUPTION IN INDIA
DISCUSSION ON THE BOOK "HEALERS OR PREDATORS"
& RELEASE OF ETHICAL DOCTORS HEALTH MANIFESTO FOR INDIA 2019
VENUE: TNG FOURTH ESTATE HALL, PRESS CLUB, TRIVANDRUM
24/02/2019, SUNDAY, 9.30am to 12.30pm

Speakers: Padmasri. Dr. M.R. Rajagopal, Padmasri. Dr. Samiran Nundy, Dr. Arun Gadre, Dr. Saijy Nagral, Dr. V. Ramesh Babu, Dr. J. Devika, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar, Dr. S. S. Sathish Kumar.

Organised by: ALLIANCE OF DOCTORS FOR ETHICAL HEALTH CARE
Powered by: HUMANS ETHICAL MEDICAL FORUM, JANSASTH ABHIYAN, KERALA SASTHRA SAHITYA PARISHATH

- After a successful meeting in Indore in December 2018, ADEH Madhya Pradesh is organising a second meeting in Bhopal on 10th March 2019. Featuring Dr Samiran Nundy and Dr Nagral as the

chief guests, the program will also focus on challenges faced by young medical professionals entering clinical practice.



Doctors, be a part of the change!



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