



The Medical Profession: Challenges, Change and the Road Ahead

Dr. R. G. Wiseman Pinto

The medical profession has undergone profound changes over the past few decades. As India observes National Doctors' Day on July 1, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the responsibilities, challenges and expectations placed upon doctors while preparing the next generation for a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape.

India observes National Doctors' Day on July 1 to commemorate both the birth and death anniversary of Dr B.C. Roy, an eminent physician and former Chief Minister of West Bengal. The occasion recognises the invaluable contribution of doctors and reminds society of the values that should guide the medical profession.

The journey to becoming a doctor is long, demanding and highly competitive. Admission to the MBBS course is based on NEET, one of the country's toughest entrance examinations. After graduation, many pursue postgraduate qualifications such as MD, MS or DNB while others continue further with super-speciality degrees including DM, MCh or DNB Super-speciality. By the time they are fully established in their chosen field, most doctors are between 32 and 35 years of age.

Doctors may serve in government or private medical colleges, government health services, corporate hospitals or establish their own clinics and nursing homes. Competition is intense across Goa and the rest of India. Some pursue higher studies abroad, with a few returning to serve their homeland while others settle overseas.

Medicine demands lifelong learning. Doctors work long hours under considerable stress and must constantly update their knowledge as new diseases, technologies and treatment protocols emerge. Besides treating patients, many serve as teachers in medical, dental, nursing, paramedical and allied health institutions. Others specialise in laboratory medicine, imaging or diagnostics.

Senior doctors shoulder numerous additional responsibilities including administration, examinations, procurement of equipment and medicines, medico-legal work, research, publications, clinical trials and presentations at conferences and continuing medical education programmes. They are often required to resolve disputes, respond to RTIs, conduct enquiries and attend administrative meetings. Despite these responsibilities, they frequently face criticism from the public, colleagues and higher authorities. Sadly, some doctors have even been abused and physically assaulted while performing their duties.

Young doctors and medical students must cultivate honesty, sincerity, punctuality, reliability, empathy, discipline, integrity and ethical practice. Although medicine remains a noble profession, challenges such as corruption, nepotism, favouritism, hypocrisy, politics and

excessive external influence have affected parts of the system. Financial considerations have also become increasingly important in segments of corporate healthcare.

Over the past five decades, the medical education landscape has changed considerably. While many doctors continue to uphold the highest standards, concerns remain regarding academic quality, declining standards in some institutions and the need to reward merit and excellence. Nevertheless, government hospitals and medical colleges continue to produce many outstanding doctors who remain beacons of hope for the sick and the poor.

Doctors must remember that compassion is as important as competence. Calm communication, empathy towards patients and their families and ethical decision-making remain essential qualities. Academic freedom, academic justice, academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to producing competent doctors who serve society with distinction. Political influence and academic irregularities must be eliminated from the profession.

Doctors are human beings. They become tired, fall ill and occasionally make mistakes despite their best efforts. They work during pandemics and under hazardous conditions while facing exposure to infectious diseases. Many have even donated their own blood before operating on critically ill patients. Their work is supported by nurses, technicians, allied health professionals, ambulance personnel, clerical staff and other hospital workers who together form the backbone of healthcare delivery.

The future of medicine belongs to those willing to embrace innovation. Young doctors must become proficient in artificial intelligence, digital medicine, genomics, robotics, next-generation sequencing, personalised medicine, integrated diagnostics and emerging biomarkers. They must continue reading, publishing research, presenting scientific papers and practising evidence-based medicine while treating patients holistically rather than relying solely on laboratory reports.

Future medical education must also emphasise preventive and predictive medicine, infectious diseases, genetic disorders, cancers in the young, mental health, suicides, lifestyle diseases, road accidents, burns, drowning, environmental pollution, radiation, ageing, chronic diseases and emerging public health challenges. Disease registries, including those for snakebite, diabetes, heart disease, dementia and chronic kidney disease, will strengthen research and healthcare planning. Upgrading Goa Medical College's Radiation Oncology services with a linear accelerator remains an important priority.

As medicine continues to evolve through automation and artificial intelligence, compassion, integrity and professional excellence must remain at its heart.

On this National Doctors' Day, let us salute doctors and all healthcare workers for their noble service and wish for a healthier, happier Goa and India.

Dr. R.G. Wiseman Pinto is a Professor of Pathology, former Head of Department at Goa Medical College, former Dean of Goa University, and the current President of the Asian Society of Cytopathology (SACH)