

What I Would Like to be Remembered for!

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DEAR SIR

As I near the date of my retirement after nearly thirty years of working as a Paediatric Surgeon in Pakistan Army, I feel great and fulfilled. If given another chance would I try to become a paediatric surgeon? Definitely Yes. More than thirty years ago during my training in Scotland United Kingdom, I joined as a registrar with Mr Abernethy [1] who was near his retirement. Over the next year or so he mentored me through a journey of real doctor - holding hands of a mother whose baby was critical condition, interrupting his ward round and sending us for coffee while he sat with parents of a child about to undergo critical surgery, calling his trainees to his home for a meal and a talk about how to prepare for FRCS, inviting even the ward's cleaning lady to the Christmas dinner – these are some of the many things I remember about this “Old School” doctor.

Over the years I have worked with many similar mentors who shaped the way I wanted to practice paediatric surgery, and despite many faults, I would like to be remembered for some of the good things, I think I did right. First of all, I would like to be remembered by my patients as the doctor who took time to talk to them, took them along and honestly explained the ways we got their babies better and spent even more time with those whose babies we were losing. Also as someone who would go out to the waiting area of theatre as soon as the operation was finished, and inform the parents that the operation went well and their baby is fine; always thinking of

the mother of the child waiting outside, for whom every minute appears like an hour. I would also like my patients to remember that their doctor explained in detail the treatment with genuine interest in their well-being and according to their level of understanding, all along making a conscious effort to sensitize and instill the same principles in the people who worked with me.

I hope I succeeded in awakening some empathy in them, which may have been dampened down by the battering of hardships of training (mostly without adequate remuneration) trying to balance critical work-life responsibilities.

I would also like to be remembered as the senior doctor who almost always had a smile and pleasant demeanor during the ward rounds and clinics, in spite of the vicissitudes of working in a strict hierarchical system. Acknowledging and greeting the student nurses, the helpers and cleaners as part of the team. Trying to understand the reasons for short-comings in their performances and coming up with doable solutions. As someone who was approachable and ‘talk able’, without fear of ridicule and wise-cracks. Always someone who would entertain patients of colleagues, doctors, medical students and hospital staff, going out of way to help and not charge, adhering to an ethical code, which should be followed by everyone in the health care fraternity. Always following the rules but not using them to get out of

responsibility and making them cumbersome, using the gray areas to give benefit to the patients. A phone call and asking for a favor can hugely facilitate an already depressed and demoralized patient.

Then I will always like my trainees to remember that I led them by hand through their initial surgical procedures and helped them master the craft by assisting them patiently through their first circumcision or hernia. Discussing and conveying the finer points learned over the years and then asking them to reflect.

Cajoling them to questions each and every thing that we do in patient care. Trying to produce “awe” and out of box thinking and treatment tailored for each patient and not simply bookish. Search each and every intervention and not take our word for it; keep nudging at the system and avoid inertia. Collect data and start writing and publishing. See, question, read and justify.

There is nothing more gratifying then to make someone learn, and see them professionally grow from a medical student to a leading consultant here and abroad. I would like to be remembered by students and trainees as someone who instilled passion in them to excel and be humane and altruistic, qualities which make us stand out from other species. We have genes which inherently make us good and kind, if only we could un-mask them. [2] As I have always preached, to save our profession and our social structure, there is only “survival of kindest”.

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