

## Caricature March 2015

by

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The three fresh medical interns Juni, Buni and Huni are starting their journey in the surgical unit. These amateurs lacking that professional attitude and experience make some mistakes that can hurt or mentally traumatize people in their surroundings. Buni and his friends are making fun as Buni touches a nurse inappropriately in front of everyone including other nurses and doctors. The nurse appears very upset and humiliated but it seems no one cares and worse no one even tries to stop Buni. As they say what goes around comes around, so Buni gets a lesson that he deserved when one day while they are out in the market another man touches his friend inappropriately. Buni loses all control and slaps that boy in the midst of all the rush and crowd. Later when he sees how disturbed his friend is he realizes what he did with that nurse and how she must have felt. The entire incident passes through his eyes and he realizes his mistake and later goes and apologizes to that nurse in front of all the staff.

The story highlights several issues. How can such a behavior be tolerated or even allowed in this day and age when human dignity and respect is considered to be of prime importance no matter which profession you choose? This becomes even more crucial in a hospital setting where all the team members taking care of patients can only perform their best when they are provided with a safe, respectful working environment. Unfortunately sexual harassment in hospitals is more common than we can imagine. The privacy and dignity of the female staff mostly nurses is being attacked leading to emotional stress, humiliation, anger, fatigue and sometimes physical illness in them. Nurses are the most common victims in the hospitals because of their close working relationship with the doctors. Somehow the doctors consider themselves superior to nurses because they think they have more education and clinical experience. Nurse's job description is misunderstood and they are abused verbally, sexually and emotionally. Unfortunately these issues are considered taboo they are hardly mentioned or dealt with appropriately. In most of the hospitals nurses don't even have any recourse or any committee that they launch their complaints. In Western countries sexual harassment of any kind is dealt with very seriously and a physician could lose their license to practice medicine if found guilty of sexual harassment.

We fail to recognize that nurses spend more time with the patients than the doctors and without them the doctors would never be able to manage their work. So it is of paramount importance that doctors and nurses should work in collaboration with mutual respect for the benefit of the patients. It is vital that fresh medical graduates are taught professional ethics including dealing with coworkers with respect and dignity. This should not be limited to doctors or nurses only but all the staff in the hospital because each one plays an important role in the care of the patients. The doctors should have competencies defined of what the expected behavior is and then they should be trained and evaluated to make sure they have achieved those competencies before they are allowed to practice. The senior doctors can act as a role model and encourage team work with the nursing staff instead of treating them as inferior.

The biggest challenge however will be how to change the mind set because unless we teach our children earlier on, to treat everyone with respect no matter who they are it is going to be difficult. We also need to teach medical students that they are the role models of our society and as such they are expected to not only follow professional ethics but they

are also morally obligated to try to stop any kind of harassment . It is sad that in the story no one is trying to stop Buni when he is harassing the nurse. This is our collective responsibility to stop injustice especially sexual harassment of women wherever it is happening but we have become numb and nothing bothers us as long as it is not happening to us. There should be specific committees in each hospital with equal representation from the nursing staff where any complaints of harassment whether it is sexual or not are dealt with. There should be laws dealing with these incidences after consultations with professional ethics board. The proceedings should be kept confidential so the victim can approach them without fear of retribution. The victims should be assured of job safety and other consequences. Unless laws against sexual harassment are strictly enforced these practices will continue and victims will continue to suffer. We as a society need to take the responsibility to stop this and work to change that. Our parents ,teachers, hospital administrators', doctors all have a potential role in reinforcing the notion of respect and dignity for fellow human beings no matter who they are or what they do.