

THE UNETHICAL MESSIAH

Medicine, the only profession that labours incessantly to destroy the reason for its own existence.

~James Bryce

Medicine and doctors have journeyed through time with variations in practice and reputations. The profession and the people involved were and are meant to alleviate the suffering of mankind. However, sometimes their attitudes are overshadowed by factors other than doctors or medical practice. In the era of evidence based medicine we find medical practice dictated by evidence acquired from double or triple blinded randomized controlled trials in order to find the best treatment and practice beneficial for the patient. Although this approach has led to improvement but it is ignorant to not recognize the grey areas of the medical arena.

These questionable and opposable areas involve doctors working in partnership with pharmaceutical companies, in the form of either receiving free drug or other favours such as getting air tickets financed by them. This gives rise to ethical issues or more plainly, a conflict of interest. One would imagine that everyone working in the medical realm including doctors and drug companies share the same idea of the betterment of the patient at heart. And in a utopian world that would be the case. But in reality their aims differ enormously. The aim of the doctor is to alleviate the suffering of the patient. The aim of the pharmaceutical industry however, is to increase their profits.

Although the industry is responsible for manufacturing life-saving drugs but their aim puts them at odds with the interest of the patients. The practice of doctors receiving free drug samples comes at a heavy cost of medical practice being coerced into vouching for these drugs, sometimes without taking into account the economic constraints and benefit on part of the patient. In more severe circumstances such as the one alluded to in the picture, doctors and their family members might have shares in the pharmaceutical business. This shrieks of conflict of interest as highlighted in the picture.

In such a situation the doctor no longer remains the proverbial messiah but becomes a businessman with only his own profit in mind which often comes at the cost of bankruptcy for the patient. In a country where people struggle to make ends meet, it seems even more unethical to merge forces with the drug companies and continue in the race for increasing profits. But in a capitalist world with every man for himself, it seems like the logical answer sometimes even to doctors. This completely defeats the purpose of the healthcare system which is supposed to be altruistic in nature.

At times the doctors might even delude themselves into thinking that favours bestowed upon them by these companies or shares involved in them does not influence medical practice or research. But as effectively shown by the picture therapeutic decisions can be influenced by commercial gains. This is simply because while the patient is the primary stakeholder in medical practice, in industry that position is assumed by the shareholder. Therefore in order to strive for better patient care the doctor ought to part ways with commercial gains.

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