



## CORRUPTION IN DAY TO DAY CLINICAL PRACTICE IN INDIA: A VIEW FROM ANOTHER SIDE

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<p><b>Article Info</b> Received 15/12/2014 Revised 27/12/2014 Accepted 02/01/2015</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Corruption, Medical practice.</p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT</b> Corruption in medical practice is a recent talk of the town, majority have criticized doctors for this. There are many factors apart from the doctors; are responsible for the corruption. There needs to understand dynamics of corruption and address all factors responsible for that. We need to understand where the corruption had started and how it had started. There are many grave consequences of the corruption in medicine and it is giving miserable effect on doctor-patient relationship. Among the areas in medicine where corruption prevails; corruption in clinical practice is an area directly closer to the doctor where he or she can make the difference by small change in his or her way of practice. Dealing with the corruption in medicine by virtue is better than solely controlling it by law and affecting the doctors and patients negatively.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

Recently there is much roar in the subject of corruption in medical practice. Most of the authors, doctors, articles and news have pointed out its unethical part and criticized it. It is absolutely and principally incorrect to have corruption in medical practice as it is considered as a noble profession. It has its dark sites and no one can deny it; but it is also important to understand the reasons behind the development of corruption in medicine. It is equally important to understand what has compelled the people working in such a noble profession to become corrupt. The corruption in medicine is not just a problem of doctors but involves multiple other factors and people. It is quite complex and just criticizing it on its surface is not enough. There need to understand the dynamics of this corruption system; there need to bring the changes; not only in medical professionals but also in public and government system. Corruption in healthcare system involves many areas like research, clinical practice, administrative part of the healthcare system etc. Corruption in clinical practice is an area out rightly associated with the doctor and with small changes in the way of day to day practice can bring down the corruption.

### Present problem

It is difficult to identify exact amount of corruption in medical practice; but reports say it is endemic [1]. Now, here it is extremely important to define what corruption is. On searching the word “corruption” on internet; following few common definitions come in the view:

1. “Corruption is the misuse of *public* power for private gain [2].”
2. “Corruption is the misuse of *entrusted* power for private gain.”
3. “Dishonest behavior by those in positions of power, such as managers or government officials. Corruption can include giving or accepting bribes or inappropriate gifts, double dealing, under-the-table transactions, manipulating elections, diverting funds, laundering money and defrauding investors.”
4. “Wrongdoing on the part of an authority or powerful party through means that are illegitimate, immoral, or incompatible with ethical standards. Corruption often results from patronage and is associated with bribery.”



Above definitions are correct in their broad meanings; but not enough to apply to a diverse groups of professions. There needs to be a separate definition or elaboration for different fields. There is no perfect definition of corruption in medical field; but second and fourth ones are acceptable definitions to apply in medicine. Certain words like bribe, rewards, gifts, commissions are difficult to differentiate; so there is a very thin line between what is right and what is not.

There are numerous forms of corruption in medicine; some of the shaking matters in day to day clinical practice are:

1. Doctors giving or getting kickback for referring the patients.
2. Doctors getting cuts for advising investigations like blood investigations or imaging studies.
3. Advising unnecessary investigations.
4. Doctors prescribing medicines of particular companies and getting sponsored for various trips or some other forms of direct or indirect monetary benefits.
5. Advising patient unnecessary admission and treatment.
6. Sending the patients or asking them to come from public hospital to a particular private hospital.
7. Charging higher to insured patients.
8. Charging very high amount.

### **How the corruption originated**

When I heard lots of things about corruption in medical practice; it made me think why people do like this. There can be two reasons for a person to be corrupt; either he or she is greedy or he or she is caused to be corrupt. If someone is greedy; it can only be controlled by laws. What does it mean by "caused corruption"? We have heard lots about corruption in India in last five years; corruption is there in every field including other noble professions and the amount of corruption is beyond imagination. I would say there is a generalized culture of corruption in our country. If whole system is corrupt; it is definitely going to affect everyone; and a doctor is also part of that everyone. I do not think we can find anyone who has not seen or not be a part of corruption; may be at very small level corruption at some point of time in his or her life.

If someone has to get a driving license; may needs to bribe someone somewhere to avoid unnecessary hurdles or long queue, if need a birth certificate; may required to bribe someone, if need a passport; may need to bribe police to clear police inquiry, if a doctor wants to buy land to build a hospital; may need to bribe to get many clearances, if someone wants government job; may need to bribe and so on, the list is non-ending. We have already witnessed so many unbelievable scams in our country in last few years. Doctors are human being and they also had passed through these experiences of this corrupt culture; because of the taste of this culture many doctors may not feel guilty or their conscience does not hurt when they get small gift or rewards; from let's say a pharmaceutical company. When these small gifts turned into a big unethical practice we

may not realize. Doctor working in a corporate hospital has to worry about the income he is making to the hospital; which sometimes force him or her to do unethical practice by advising unnecessary reports or admission. It is difficult to identify how the trend of kickback has originated; but it appears from the discussion with friends and colleagues that it started by big corporate hospitals in attempt to get return for their huge investments. Many doctors working in public sector are not getting adequate income and gets diverted to work in private sector to get an extra money or some other form of unethical practice [3].. Many doctors are not joining public healthcare system because of lack of infrastructure and professional progress. I heard that at many places almost everyone gives kickback; so even if a doctor is not interested in giving kickback is forced to become part of this corrupt system to run his or her practice; otherwise he or she will not get adequate work. In our country; majority of the patients do not come directly to specialist doctor, so specialist's practice invariably depends on referral which is also one of the reason to develop this kickback system.

### **Noble profession and money**

People say that medicine is a noble profession and it is not for the money. If we look at the words in a dictionary; noble and profession, noble means "having or showing or indicative of high or elevated character; or having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles" and profession means "a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification". So, noble profession means an occupation with very high principles and morality. But at the same time it does not mean necessarily that it is at free of cost. Although as it involves high moral principles; there must be a money with all ethical and moral values.

To get training and becoming a doctor involves high amount of financial and mental exercise. The training period is very long and exhaustive. There are surveys which say that medical examinations are one of the toughest examinations to clear. It also involves lots of social sacrifices and mental stress which even continue after becoming a doctor. So after so much of hard works; doctors have all the rights to expect monetary gain; of course maintaining the moral and ethical values. Doctor and his or her family members also have all the rights to expect a good quality of life.

If we compare the efforts and hard work require becoming a doctor with any other profession; this profession scores over majority of others, and if we look at the monetary part; it does not scores over others. This difference is much more obvious in public healthcare system. In teaching institutions the faculties are training next generations apart from serving the poor patients. They even deserve more. Recently there is news for regulating the charges in medical practice. People may argue that a particular doctor charges more than others. But see other



fields; one actor charges higher than others according to his or her TRP (television rating point); one builder charges higher than other for a property according to his or her quality; one airline charges higher than the other for the same destination. So why doctor cannot charge according to his or her experience and specialty; it is not an unreasonable argument. Teaching is also a noble profession; but even one school charges higher than others for providing education of the same syllabus. So, regulating the charges of doctors is definitely a debatable issue. Doctor has to pay all the taxes; he or she is not getting any subsidy for building a hospital and there is no special provision of benefit to the doctors in any way.

But for a doctor; it is a moral responsibility not to charge unreasonably high for his or her expertise. Doctor surely deserves good income and quality of life but all with good ethics and morality. So even if regulations do not watch over us, it is our duty to keep image of this profession clean and maintain the dignity of this profession. What only we get more than other profession is the respect in society; which is the most important gain one can have. Money should not be a primary goal for any doctor; I think it should be the by product or secondary goal in medical practice. I firmly believe that if a particular doctor executes a genuine practice; he or she will surely have a reasonable income as a byproduct. We must behave like a self-disciplined group of people and maintain unselfish aspects of service to the mankind.

### **Implications of corruption in medical practice**

There was a time when patients and relatives used to trust the doctors blindly; they used to believe doctors next to the God. As the corrupt practice evolved, there has been an increase in trust deficit in doctor-patient relationship. Now patients invariably opt for second opinions, they question at every step of treatment, they doubts many times. People have started seeing every doctor with a doubtful mind. It has caused significant impacts on the process of the diagnosis and treatment of the patients. Even an ethical doctor has to face patients' doubts and doctor have becomes over-conscious about medicolegal consequences. It is very difficult to treat the patient when there is a trust deficit. In such situations doctors sometimes advise extra investigations even if there is no need clinically to save his or her side in the court; which causes patients an extra financial burden. Even when doctor is providing correct treatment; patient and relatives doubts which directly or indirectly results in suffering of patient's treatment. The respect which doctors used to get is vanishing off rapidly from the society [4]. There has been increase in the medicolegal litigations; and due to this even many genuine doctors faces the problems. Eventually genuine doctors start treating patients more

keeping the medicolegal aspects in view rather the clinical aspects.

### **The way forward: the law versus the virtue**

The question arises; is it possible to survive for a doctor without corruption? It seems it is somewhat difficult in the beginning but not impossible. Surviving and elevating yourself without corruption might take longer time and some more sacrifice but eventually it pays back. The truth always prevails.

Now there are two ways to control corruption; one way is by law and another is by virtue. Law is not a primary way to prevent corruption in medical practice; of course it has its own role in certain situations. Medicine is an incomplete science and viewing it completely by law is not a good idea; it is a subjective field where one plus one is not always two. It is a field where we are dealing with human beings and their emotions. Each decision during treatment involves many financial, social and emotional aspects of patients and their relatives. Law does not feel emotions; so if law will take complete control of this field, it may affect negatively both the doctors and the patients.

Avoiding the corruption in medical field by virtue and gaining back the respect is a better long term solution; beneficial to both doctors and patients. We must work like a self-disciplined group of people. We must have highest moral and ethical standards. There are certain very clear areas where there is no doubt about unethicity which must be stopped. We must realize that the respect we gain is the highest level of gain one can have. Ethics in the medical practice must be taught early [5] during the training and continue during every stage training program [6]. Doctor patient relationship is a divine relationship and we must maintain dignity of this profession. We must realize that money must be the byproduct of this profession rather a primary goal. At the same time; government and corporate sectors have also need to look at this profession in a different way. Government has to look upon the salary of doctors working in public healthcare system carefully and also need to provide adequate infrastructure to strengthen the system. Corporate sectors also need to understand that unethical practice is not the only way to get return of their investment. It is a high time to act; rather being late and making our own life miserable in long run. Before other parties responsible for the corruption would change; let's start charity at home, let's initiate changes from our own day to day clinical practice.

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