

ENKINDLING A HUMAN JOURNEY - CLAIRVOYANCE 2017 SPEECH AT TISS, MUMBAI.

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Member of the Management at TISS, Invited delegates and my dear student friends, I feel truly honoured and privileged to have been invited by you. I have always believed, that you are truly an energetic, powerful, enterprising bunch of men and women who would lead our country to the Promised Land, to the citadel of glory for all the times to come and for the ages.

I believe in you, in your power to change the fortunes of multitudes through your wealth and wisdom. It is therefore that I come to your doorstep to learn from you what best we can do together for the greater glory of healthcare, for our people and for the world.

My experiments with public health began early in life when I started doing small time programmes, making visits to different places and discovering a world beyond the corridors of a medical school.

I was fascinated by the diversity and poverty amidst plenty that exist in a mega-city like Mumbai. On one hand you have the best of businesses flourishing and thriving in the financial capital and on the other day, a child struggle to have two square meals.

Moving slightly up north and down south or to the east or to the north east, we are faced with

challenges very different which push public health workers to the brink. Imagine, when the stock markets crash by 20 points it becomes news, but when day after day people on the road die for no fault of theirs, it doesn't become news. When mothers die because of preventable deaths and the politics of motherhood, it doesn't become news. This is a classical case of exclusion.

It is a public health problem when year after year our cities get flooded and our buildings collapse. It is our problem when the burden of cancer rises, when organ transplantation is not strengthened and when the country is declared as the world's most depressed country.

It also becomes our problem when our health systems are unable to manage the load of patients because of poor resource allocation and fiscal budget constraints.

If health is not a human right in India, you and I are to blame.

To my dear public health champions and leaders, I ask of you today, I ask of you this very moment, What can you do for them? And what can you learn from them?

I often find my motivation among those who have a vocal cord, but their voice is not heard, those who have eyes yet are blinded, those who have ears, yet cannot hear, because the systems have kept them that way. We have cultivated poverty at our very doorsteps. That is why I believe New Delhi's ways much change. Nirman Bhavan must go through tiring reforms. I haven't been in New Delhi for a long time, but I have been there long enough to know that our approach must change.

When our GDP in Healthcare gets decreased, which is by all standards low enough, it doesn't hurt the folks at South Block or Mantralaya or Vidhan Soudha. It hurts the last man on the ground.

Public Health is when a mother's child can get a new life. When a community can survive a disaster because you live, when obese patients become slim, when those with disabled people discover their special abilities, when quality control reduces hospital acquired infections, when a elderly patient at the sunset of life, dies a peaceful death.

Health care and health systems bring us closest to understand man and machines, diseases and deaths, wisdom and wealth. As you go forth to face the world, remember, Health care was a mission since the start of time, it necessarily had to become a profession, it became an industry in the worst sense of the word. Today we work with corporate healthcare, we work with public sector units and we work with mission hospitals. While the goal is the same, the path leading to the goals differ. Textbooks cannot teach you what you need to learn maturing through the extra-ordinary school called experience.

Many of you tomorrow may end up working as consultants to government machineries. Our processes of Governance can be noisy, messy and complicated. But dive in, get your hands dirty, and slowly and steadily bring in reforms. Society will start to believe in you, when you start to believe in yourself.

Not long ago, I was undertaking a training and evaluation in the remote islands of the Brahmaputra river at the Boat Clinics, the lives of those people not just motivated me, but also left a lasting and enduring impression on what kind of a future is worth building.

Public health is a great instrument to change human destinies. The knowledge you have acquired over the two years at TISS must transpire into solid action. This action can be arrived at by various forms. To some of you it may be research and advocacy, to others it might be in the form of Consultancy, to others it may be program implementation.

My appeal to you would be focus on excellence, not on money. While money is important and necessary, it will not yield the results you wish to seek.

Find purpose in what you do.

While money is necessary, it cannot be a precursor to every other thing you wish to engage in. Run behind quality is what I would request you to do, not behind money.

Communicate well

The problem with most people today around the world is the disease and inability to communicate. You send a mail they don't respond, you ask an appointment, they don't provide. Are you occupying positions and chairs to help others or to help yourself?

Translate grass-root experience into scientific content

As public health leaders you are expected to work in the field more than you work among the four walls. Your brand incarnate will grow when you translate your grass-root experience into public health evidence.

Our constitution has shied away from declaration health as a human right, our energies need to be channelled to fix our crumbling buildings and cockroach infested public hospitals. We ought to bring in health in all policies and we need to also ensure that social determinants of health are addressed.

Public health systems can be strengthened only when we begin to invest in public health.

Our time has arrived to bail our country out of its too many public health problems. Will you join in, make your voice heard and create an Arab spring in Health care for India ?

Jai Hind.