

LESSONS IN INDIAN HEALTHCARE: WHAT PHD SUPERVISORS MUST KNOW

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I speak for those doctoral candidates who are scared what their supervisors think, I speak for those post graduates in healthcare who are bullied into submission on what is expected from them and how they must conduct themselves. One thing every doctoral candidate and post graduate resident in medical colleges must remember, is that during your work hours focus on your work, but your supervisor must never interfere into your external professional commitments of networking, writing, attending conferences, workshops, events, completing books or going places on invitations. It is not their concern on what the candidate does for his/her professional growth outside of normally accepted work hours.

Article 19 of the Indian Constitution safeguards the right to freedom of speech, expression and movement. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution safeguards the right to liberty and little do PhD supervisors understand this facet. The expectation to monitor and so called remote control candidates is obsolete and growth lies only in connecting with our multi-polar world.

Some of the best academic minds recognize this fact that, the best lessons their candidates can learn is an awareness of what their curriculum and immediate surroundings cannot teach, of what they do not know and must rather explore from a big world outside. We only grow by appreciating cultures, debating ideas, connecting with different minds outside of core working groups. This would in some ways create insecurity feelings among supervisors who don't wish their students rise above them. But the true mark of a leader is to create more leaders, open the doors and windows of opportunity and encourage them to expand on their own by not tying them down within the four walls of what is perceived as curriculum based growth.



There are number of case studies in human history where outward growth has been opposed and creative thoughts possibly attempted to be hijacked or killed. Instances like Prof Paul Torrance, who

dedicated a lifetime to furthering creativity in academics faced opposition. There are number of issues pertaining to the academic progress and forward thought. How academic institutions groom students and encourage them remains of significant doubt and calls for introspection, the manner in which female students are exploited is increasingly being spoken of, the threats received by students in general if they do not oblige to the orders of their professors and supervisors is not new, but this needs to be exposed and fixed on a regular basis. We cannot leave young minds to be bullied just because they do not have god-fathers or an ecosystem that would protect them from such instances. The increasing global evidence serves to encourage creativity at all layers. Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk in 2003 discussed how current systems suppress creativity and it attracted over five million viewers.

What is necessary from medical teachers today is a timeless blend of common sense, people sense and student sense. We live in different times and old orthodox obsolete methods no longer hold ground. The work allotted to supervisors must be done by supervisors and not dumped on their students.

I am reminded of two instances, a friend who was a foreign national & was pursuing his PhD in India wanted to forge new partnerships while earning his PhD and also wanted to adhere to certain international standards, however the supervisor was an egoistic person who refused to give any hearing to whatever suggestions were put forth and was not open to the candidate working to forge partnerships either. This defeats the very idea of even being a supervisor and speaks both of the content and character of the supervisor concerned.

I am also reminded of a reflection which surprised me, long ago and far away. I used to be associated with number of programmes, associations and social welfare organizations during my under-graduate medical student days, one day I was asked by one of the then management committee member who enquired as to who gave me the permission to associate with other organizations and associations, without having formally taken permission. The question politely surprised me, as to how funny some people can be, I simply answered saying that I am a free citizen of the Republic of India & engaged with other institutes of repute, where the work I do, has no direct conflict of interest to my current position. Back then remember, I was only a student. Period.