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Leadership in Healthcare is a neglected issue: A call for action

Waris Qidwai

Healthcare and medical profession stands at crossroads today. Unprecedented technological advances as a result of ongoing scientific research has revolutionized healthcare around the world. Despite these developments, we are still faced with a huge burden of communicable diseases, an ever rising burden of non-communicable diseases, coupled with an increasing load of mental health diseases and accidents in healthcare.^{1,2}

There are several reasons for our failure to address healthcare issues of our populations, including a desperate need to revamp existing medical and health care related curriculum.³ In addition to considering curriculum change, perhaps single most needed change we need to address is a growing need to develop leadership in medical healthcare related profession.⁴

Leadership is the quality considered mandatory to bring about positive change. A discipline that lacks leadership is unlikely to progress and grow. Medical profession has remained one of the most disciplined and organized discipline and with sole purpose to serve ailing humanity. One can argue, with substantial evidence that leadership development and execution in medical profession has remained far from satisfactory with resultant stagnation in the growth of the discipline.

A change cannot be expected, unless leadership exists and works towards change to identify and bridge gaps, mobilize required resources and take other essential steps that can improve health related outcomes. Unfortunately, medical and related healthcare profession has failed to focus on developing much needed leadership in profession. It is often quoted that if one wants to mess up a situation, Physician should be appointed as Manager to handle it. This quotation may not entirely be correct, but does point out towards an existing weakness in our profession that requires serious attention.

Leadership must possess the capacity to work across all fronts. In order to positively impact policies, leadership of a profession must have sufficient capability to exert political pressure and work with political leadership. If one looks at current debate related to Obama care, one should not be surprised to unfortunately see politicians having their say more than medical profession. Similar situation exists across health care provision across countries,⁵ where medical profession has failed to positively impact policies that could bring about real change in health care services in practice,

including healthcare related outcomes.

A Healthcare professional is often regarded as community leader. It is indeed a pity that despite enjoying such a privileged position, health care profession had failed to make a real impact due to lack of leadership qualities that are currently not the focus of professional development.

Not much emphasis given in selection process at undergraduate and postgraduate levels where decisions are made with regards to selection of future leaders in health care. More emphasis is given and correctly so on voluntary and community work during the selection process. Equal if not more stress should be given to leadership potential among applicants, entering medical and health care related profession.

There is a clear lack of focus on developing leadership skills and training programs during undergraduate as well as postgraduate education in health care professions, despite the evidence of benefits of such training.⁶ Curriculum lacks focus in offering courses and modules on developing leadership skills. It is said that assessment drives learning, but our assessments at undergraduate and postgraduate levels does not assess for leadership skills, since it is not there in the curriculum. It's time that appropriate changes are made in medical, nursing and healthcare related curriculum, so that a strong focus is placed on leadership and its development in medical and health care related professionals.

As we consider making changes in medical and healthcare related curriculum at both undergraduate and post graduate levels, an important task remains to provide courses and opportunities to current medical and health care related professional to learn and improve upon their leadership skills and implement in their practices.

It is imperative that policy makers, governments, national and international medical and healthcare related organizations as well as academic institutions play their important role in ensuring that medical and healthcare related professionals become effective leaders.

If we are serious about passing on benefits of technological advances in medical and healthcare related profession to our populations and positively impact their health to full extent, it will be necessary to ensure medical and healthcare related professionals assume leadership position. It is our sincere appeal to all stakeholders to effectively play their role in making

medical and health care related professionals, true and effective leaders.

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