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Amit Agrawal

Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences, India

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YOUNGER NEUROSURGEONS: AMBITIONS, EXPECTATIONS OR DILEMMA?

The world is undergoing a rapid cultural, social, economic, informational, technological, and scientific revolution that was never experienced before in human history.¹ Advances in scientific knowledge are so rapid that in 5 to 10 years, most of what one has learned is out of date.³ The information technology revolution has launched medicine into hyper-modernity. Recent advances in technology into the healthcare system and a strong business culture has dramatically influenced the practice of medicine with the ideas of market, profit and efficiency.⁴ However, doctors are still highly regarded and trusted by the public when compared to many other professions.

Nowadays, most of us make career choices based on income expectations, working hours, length of training time and many other secondary considerations.⁶ Neurosurgeons work in an environment of high demands and sometimes difficult structural working conditions that include remote areas, areas with inadequate facilities, particularly in developing countries. In neurosurgery, compared with other professions, return on educational investment over a working lifetime is fairly low; if this is not understood while choosing it as a career, this can create an environment of insecurity and frustration later on. We all learn many procedures during our residency from our senior colleagues and from each other. We learn to perform basic procedures including shunts, extradurals and subdurals, and all of us want to do good and interesting cases with best results whatever may be the available resources. A bulk of this work is possible in remote areas even with limited facilities and resources. However, performing major neurosurgical procedures is difficult and unsafe in remote areas and over a period of time can give rise to professional dissatisfaction. While we work in rural areas, other limitations include difficulty in upgrading ourselves, and this may be due to inadequate facilities, difficulty to find good working conditions, lack of financial support, low affordability of serving population and neglect by the government and mainstream people. To overcome this shortcoming, there is an option to attend learning events such as hands-on workshops and conferences; however all these activities need huge financial investment both to learn and to arrange. Most of the time, it is very difficult for people to get access to these opportunities, particularly those who work in remote areas.

Lifestyle and career orientation have changed in the younger generation. The central preoccupation for many of us is how to structure and use leisure time and holidays. All work is being seen as a necessary ill; not as a valuable part of our existence. Sometime one may be reluctant to work for long hours and would not like to do night calls or invest his or her extra time with patients. This desire to work for fewer hours for both male and female doctors may be to find better balance between work and personal life. It becomes more problematic when one is willing to prioritize his or her professional career at the expense of personal life. This can cause further dissatisfaction in our professional life and can be very disruptive for a practice and can create difficult situations for fellow colleagues also. Further inability to define and understand our priorities before choosing a career has resulted in fewer young people who feel satisfied with their achievements in life.

There are many questions with many answers that can help us to be happy and satisfied. What is it that will make you happy in life? Is it having what the next person has or more? Is it being satisfied with what you want or have regardless of what others believe? What is really important in your life? Unless we understand and find out answers to these questions it will be difficult to get happiness, as any amount of external measures cannot be a means of happiness. In today's perspective, mere knowledge is not enough to claim fame, and most successes and achievements are measured and compared in terms of money. This gives more dissatisfaction. The answer to this question can be found in yet another question: If you had all the money you wanted, what would you do with it? One can realize the answer is not very easy. I would like to quote Professor Cappabianca's words that "It may be helpful for a young person just starting out to be a neurosurgeon to become acquainted with the profession in advance. Neurosurgery is a difficult discipline, and the road a young man or woman must take to practice this profession properly is a long one. The difficulties encountered and to be conquered during the training period, initially, and in practice later are numerous and burdensome, and the satisfactions are unfailingly mixed with troubles, both at work and within the family, which inevitably suffers because of the intense life of a neurosurgeon."⁴ Neurosurgery is not a discipline that can be performed tangential to a life focused on other objectives.⁵ Improvement in the quality and the quantity of the work performed in the field of neurosurgery, including speed and precision with which it is accomplished can be learnt over a period time. We gradually learn to face challenges particularly accepting setbacks or poor results. It is beyond doubt that it took many years of work and sacrifice for our senior associates to build the practice of neurosurgery. Unless we understand this reality, our progress will remain incomplete.

Amit Agrawal

Associate Professor (Neurosurgery)

Clinical and Administrative Head

Division of Neurosurgery

Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences

Sawangj (Meghe), Wardha Maharashtra

India

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