

Editorial

The Quest for Wisdom or Addiction to Power

Jaffar M Al Bareeq, DLO, RCP, RCS (London)*

“Better to get hurt by the truth than comforted with a lie”

Khaled Hosseini

As you study medicine, you are asked to keep an eye on issues of depth and practicality of knowledge delivered to you.

Medicine is the love and pursuit of wisdom. Because of this, great teachers in medicine have always suggested that it is important for us to examine our beliefs and update our knowledge. Are those beliefs justified? Are they true? Are they capable of giving us good guidance to diagnose and alleviate the suffering of our patients?

We live in a society riddled with superstition and it is bound to rub on some of us. Superstition suspends the power of reason and judgment; the moment you believe in superstition the power of logic evaporates. Millions could believe in a superstition, yet it could not be true. Those who believe in superstition are made slave to the extent of sacrificing themselves to it.

I will cite few examples of superstition, which had been believed by many illiterates and few highly educated.

1. In Bahrain, twenty years ago a story circulated that somebody has insulted one of the saints and was punished by growing horns on his head. Some people would swear that they have seen him, others are scared to go out and they have locked themselves indoor. Others believed that he was operated on in SMC for removal of the horns.
2. Arabs who suffer from severe mental illness are believed to have been struck by an “an evil eye” rather than having psychiatric or neurological illness. Many educated Arabs believe that there is such thing as an ‘Evil Eye’.
3. Keep the pregnancy a secret for the first three months, because some people might envy the pregnancy and throw an ‘Evil Eye’. Many people believe that miscarriage is usually associated with the ‘Evil Eye’.
4. In many Arab countries, including GCC, it is widely believed that pregnant women should avoid cats especially the black ones because the cat has the magical power to steal the child’s vitality.

* Chief Editor

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Email: jmab@batelco.com.bh

5. A child who is left crying alone too much might be snatched by the 'Jinni' and replaced by one of the Jinni's babies.

Superstition could be personal one such as the one held by former AGU president that all Bahraini doctors are bad and evils, simply because during Arab board examination one Bahraini examiner did not give the candidate enough marks to pass the examination in psychiatry. A man or a woman obsessed by an unrealistic idea or superstition could be dangerous and destructive.

In medicine, we are not supposed to believe an idea without the analysis of the knowledge. We are supposed to take the components apart and then try to put them together to formulate a diagnosis or an idea.

Take the concept or the idea of pregnant woman. To analyze pregnant woman and break it into necessary and sufficient conditions, we start with a definition: "pregnant woman is married or unmarried woman, female human being of fertile age". What are the components here? Female, human being, married or unmarried, of fertile age. There are four conditions. Each of them is necessary for pregnant woman. You cannot be a pregnant woman unless you are female. This alone is not sufficient. My dog is female. You have to be human, too. However, my nurse is a female human, and she is not a pregnant woman. Each of the conditions is necessary, and all four together (jointly) are sufficient for pregnant woman. This process of analysis we borrowed from philosophy.

Doctors are supposed to have quest for wisdom continuously during their lifetime. The quest for destruction not wisdom was exemplified by the former AGU president who made the life's pursuit to destroy Bahraini talents in the AGU, succeeded in some and failed in others.

The former AGU president is not the only one, many years ago another one made nine Bahraini consultants out of a total of sixteen to resign from the main hospital because he changed the law without consultation.

A third one, a director of a hospital, have alienated seven Bahraini consultants and forced them to leave the public service.

Many chairpersons of departments behave like little dictators and enforce their professional jealousy resulting into destruction of their colleagues and the loss of professional talents from that department.

Clear abuse of power is seen when a consultant who have private clinic refers a patient from his clinic to his junior in the accident and emergency room. He labels that patient as an acute case while it is a routine admission. If the junior refuse to comply by not admitting the patient, he would be risking his promotion and future favors.

Some chairpersons in subspecialty do not promote their juniors because of the fear that they will compete with them in the future.

A chairperson who is not as knowledgeable and less popular with the patients, especially in his private clinic, compared to other consultants in his department, makes their lives miserable and forces them to resign.

A chairperson of a department who held the position for over ten years, he was not fully qualified in that specialty; he was flagged left and right by Asian consultants. He never recommended any Bahraini doctor for postgraduate training in that specialty. The first three consultants went abroad for training at their own expenses; when they returned to Bahrain, they excelled in that specialty.

I know a chief resident who had approached the age of 50 years, his juniors had been appointed as consultants, but he remained in his position. His only mistake that he is doubly qualified and highly trained and the evaluation committee members are not fully qualified to evaluate him; therefore, they played a game with him, showing him where the power resides.

Amazing phenomenon that all those who exercise their extreme power on their citizen professionals are extremely gentle with expatriates especially the European white ones. عيبه للأجانب هم ولكن على أبناء جلدتهم اسود

After all the education and training (first and second generation of Bahraini doctors), have we attained the wisdom we are seeking; have we achieved what medieval Arab doctors have achieved who made their depth in the history of mankind or did we make fools of ourselves by seeking medicine for the pathological power over life and death and the ultimate future of our colleagues.

According to Hippocrates oath, we are supposed to treat our colleagues as members of our family, to encourage them and promote their professional skills not to destroy them. This is a reminder to the former AGU president and others who seek the blood of their colleagues.

We need common sense to deal with our colleagues and others. According to Aristotle and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), common sense provides the place in which the senses come together. Common sense is analyzing the available data and knowledge to make sound judgment.

In Arabic, the Doctor is called 'Hakim', in English it means 'Wiseman'. He was called so because he preserves life and he never rush into judgment. A Wiseman insists on depth. Many of the Arab doctors, in medieval period were philosophers and many of them either imprisoned or executed for their liberal thoughts.

Education and knowledge promote wisdom in our lives, and wisdom brings with it two benefits: Depth and practicality.

Wisdom endows us with an insight about living, about our world and about perceptiveness of judgment.

Wisdom is liberation from false pride, narrow mindedness, sectarianism, tribalism and prejudice of all kinds. Wisdom is to seek and attain the truth.

A wise doctor does not readily fall prey to false appearances or superstition. Wisdom sees the hidden side of any situation and analyzes it to its smallest components.

Wisdom is neither rushed nor stampeded into foolish action. Wisdom is the depth of knowledge and the use of common sense.

Some people are full of pretense, as you approach them in depth, you discovered the façade. They have an entrance of a palace but the inner rooms of a cottage; this is the difference with the Wiseman who may have the appearance of cottage but the inner rooms of a palace.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle focused on wisdom, which could be found in the writings of Confucius and Lao Tsu and many Arab philosophers, Al-Ma‘arri, al-Mawardi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn al-Nafis, Ibn 'Arabī, al-Kindī, Ibn Bājjah, Jābir ibn Hayyān and others who contributed great deal to the tradition that seeks both depth and usefulness in matters concerning human life. The Arab contribution to the scientific logic and the philosophy of “Alkalam” is unmatched.

The words of Socrates still reverberate through the centuries in the court of Athens. Five hundred Athenian Jurists would decide his fate after weighing the evidence against him. Even though he told them,

“Are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?”

He went on to say:

“Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence brings about wealth and all other public and private blessings for men”.

The verdict rendered after that speech was guilty. The penalty that the prosecutor proposed was an extreme one: Death by poison.

Former US president Calvin Coolidge once remarked that “Some people are suffering from lack of work, some from lack of water, many more from lack of wisdom”.

CONCLUSION

Professionals do not grow on trees; consultant preparation needs 30-35 years. It would be the greatest miracle of the 21st century if Dr Fadhella Al Mahroos was a consultant pediatrician the moment she was born and she was able to treat children while she was toddler or Dr Abdulla Al Malki, as soon as he was born he started operating on patients replacing their knees. Development of a consultant takes many years and it evolves in stages similar to the evolution of man. Those who have no hesitation to destroy professionals have no hesitation to destroy the human being who developed over four millions years and to destroy the earth which developed over 4.5 billion years.

For comment send to jmab@batelco.com.bh