

Address during 20th Annual Convocation of  
The Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, Chennai  
10 July 2010

Role of healthcare professionals in societal transformation

Let my brain remove the pain

I am indeed delighted to participate in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Convocation of the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University. My congratulations to the graduating students who will be taking up the responsibility of delivering quality healthcare to the society. I was going through the mission of the university which says that it strives “to create personnel for health manpower who will be endowed with a sense of dedication and a spirit of enquiry and will contribute substantially to the Alma Mater goals of health for all by 2020 A.D”. Such focused approach which envisages an objective goal of universal healthcare is indeed a hallmark of a great university led by visionary leaders of the past and present. I was also happy to see the multi-dimensional array of healthcare courses offered by the university which cover all types of illnesses and different streams of medicines including Siddha, Unani, Ayurveda, Allopathy, Homeopathy and Yoga. When I am here with healthcare experts and students, I would like to share my views on the topic “Role of healthcare professionals in societal transformation”.

---

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam  
[www.abdulkalam.com](http://www.abdulkalam.com)

Dear friends, what will inspire you, since you are all the graduating students, particularly when you are entering into your career, you will like to hear certain inspiring lives in your healthcare domain. Let me first discuss about three individual healthcare professionals known to me, who through their light of knowledge have been engaged in transformational societal missions to remove the pain and sufferings of humanity. I am sure that the unique life and work of three healthcare givers will be a beacon of inspiration for the young graduates.

The first example of a noble healthcare professional is healthcare giver who left his foreign job and using the strength of cooperative movement that led to the birth of a low cost high quality rural hospital.

Healthcare as a social entrepreneurial mission

Friends, in February 2010, I visited the Warana valley of Kolhapur Maharashtra. There I witnessed, how cooperative movement by the local farmers and villagers is bringing out a socio-economic transformation of the people and the region. The Warana PURA complex has many initiatives for the income generation and amenities for about 60,000 families in the Warana area. One of the initiatives which I visited was the Mahatma Gandhi Hospital at New Pargaon at Warana.

The Mahatma Gandhi Hospital was established by late Shri Tatyasaheb Kore and his son Dr. Sudhakar Kore, who manages the hospital now. Dr Sudhakar Kore is an MBBS and MS in General Surgery. After his education in 1970, Dr

Sudhakar Kore worked in many famous hospitals of Scotland, UK for seven years. All this time, the healthcare in his native village of Warana were lacking and the local had to go to distant cities of Pune and Mumbai for even small treatments, Dr. Kore wanted to do service for his nation and the people of Warana. Thus, in 1979, he chose to return to Warana Valley, leaving his foreign job, to serve local needy. He started his own hospital in Sangli district along with his family. With the help of the cooperative movement, Mahatma Gandhi Charitable Trust was established in Warana which led to the birth of Mahatma Gandhi Hospital. This not-for-profit hospital was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1992. The Mahatma Gandhi hospital is a 225 bedded hospital with 2 medical sub-centres of 25 beds each located about 10 kilometers from the base hospital.

Today, this hospital has an area of 110,000 square feet and built over an area of 27 acres. It has four operations theatres for providing modern surgery facility to the population within Warana. The Mahatma Gandhi Hospital and its extension healthcare centre are offering various healthcare facilities like medicine, surgeries, orthopedics, obstetrics, pediatrics, ophthalmology, ENT, pathology and radiology at affordable cost and even free to the needy. Dr Sudhakar Kore is an example of how educated and talented doctors with spirit of social entrepreneurship and with the help of a cooperative movement can bring about a transformation in the healthcare

for people living in an area of poor accessibility. The doctors and healthcare professionals graduating today may like to think on how they can apply their knowledge in an entrepreneurial way for achieve a great societal mission.

Now let me talk about a great healthcare giver whose mission has been to bring the light of vision to the lives of millions.

### Lead Kindly Light

I have known Late Dr. Venkatasamy for over three decades. He is known for his silent contribution and bringing light to thousands of people. All his life, he has worked for total elimination of avoidable blindness. He has brought with the Aravind Eye Hospital, the best of technology and management. He has established a network of Aravind Hospitals and also the mobile clinics. He has created many leaders in the field, who are spread in various parts of the world. Whichever eye hospital I visited in India, I met a number of people, who had been trained by Dr. Venkatasamy's institutions. It was amazing to see how even in his eighties he was radiating enthusiasm and perseverance for realizing his vision.

Dr Venkatswamy championed the community ophthalmology service in Tamilnadu and surrounding region. This was at a time when there was tremendous amount of cataract back log, and there were not enough specialists. Using a systematic approach to mass screening and surgery

he infused both science and discipline to mass surgical eye camp. The mass movement for treatment of cataract shifted from improvised operating rooms to hospital operating room facilities. Aravind has successfully integrated their core competence of community ophthalmology with modern medical treatment and research.

Dr Venkataswamy implemented his principle that the Aravind hospital must provide services to reach rich and poor alike, yet the eye care facility must be financially self-supporting. The entire Aravind Eye care system is conducting on an average 800 eye surgeries per day and annually treat over 2.5 million patients. They are providing for every 30 paid patients, free treatment for 70 patients who cannot afford. This principle is achieved through high quality, large volume care and a well-organized system.

Aravind has grown into five hospitals with nearly 3,600 beds and 26 vision centres spread in different parts of Tamilnadu particularly in rural areas. The important aspect of Aravind system is that the productivity per ophthalmic specialists is 5 times that of national productivity. Arvind has contributed in a big way to reduce the avoidable blindness in the country. The world has recognized Aravind's contribution. Recently I was happy to see many researchers from different parts of the world as partners while inaugurating Venkataswamy Research Centre at Madurai.

The life of Dr. Venkataswamy gives the message to all of us and particularly the aspiring medical graduates, how commitment to a vision can make missions happen.

Now let me talk about a healthcare professional who had been instrumental in bringing healthcare to unreached people in a remote region in southern India.

### Reaching the Unreached

In the present circumstances and environment, it was inspiring to see, how a MBBS doctor has put all his dreams in mainstreaming the tribal citizens of Karnataka for the last 25 years through Vivekananda Girijana Kalyan Kendra (VGKK), at BR Hills. When I visited BR Hills in 1998 and subsequently in 2006, I could see substantial new developments in that area. I could see that “New Tribal Hospital”, Roads and education environment and above all the earning capacity of the tribal citizens have been increased with the technology resource centre as a base. Dr. H. Sudarshan, is the inspiring architect of this societal transformation.

Dr. Sudarshan’s father died in a village without any medical help when he was just twelve. This event followed by his reading the biography of Dr. Albert Schweitzer who worked in Africa motivated Dr. Sudarshan to take up medical profession and work in tribal areas in India. Dr. Sudarshan derives his philosophy of work from Swami Vivekananda’s

teachings which states “they alone live who live for others, rest are more dead than alive”.

Dr. Sudarshan starts his day at 4.30 am in the morning with Yoga, meditation and prayer with tribal school children. From 9 am to 1pm, he goes around the ward and sees the patients individually. He has lunch with the tribal students between 1 and 2 pm in the afternoon. Later till 7 pm, he is busy in the clinic where he conducts surgeries and visits tribal complex. Later, he has dinner with the tribal students. He devotes one hour for study between 9 and 10 pm, so that he gets updated information about medical systems. He spends large part of his time in Clinical Diagnosis, Laboratory diagnosis and treatment, in addition to Supervising, Monitoring, teaching and carrying out research along with his team members.

Dr. Sudarshan pays particular attention to the special problems of the tribals such as Snake bite cases, Mauling by bears, Pneumonia, Tuberculosis and Acute Respiratory Infections. The Soliga tribal people suffer from Sickle Cell Anemia and Dr. Sudarshan has developed a low cost electrophoresis machine for diagnosing the disease. He has also built the healthcare system on the strengths of traditional knowledge available in the tribal areas. The secret of his service is that he is empowering the people to manage their own health through the provision of knowledge. He has trained tribal girls as Auxiliary Nurse & Midwife (ANM) and posted

them in the Tribal Sub-centers. These nurses undergo 18 months course. Thus the rural area is self-sufficient in nursing resource. He has also developed low cost management system for Epilepsy in the Primary Healthcare Centre (PHC). He has introduced Dental Healthcare and Cancer Control in the PHC. He is providing quality healthcare to the people by the introduction of low premium health insurance for all the people living below poverty line. He suggests that medical colleges should teach their students to develop sensitivity to the suffering of the patients. They also need to modify the treatment approach for the poor who cannot afford costly treatment. The aim of the medical education should be to facilitate application of medical technology for providing best care to the poor at the most affordable cost. Dr. Sudarshan says 'the greatest joy, he experienced was when he resuscitated a patient whose lungs and heart had stopped and when he sees the smile on the face of poor patients who come to the hospital with blindness (cataract in both eyes) and walk out with full vision after the cataract surgery. Country needs thousands of Dr. Sudarshans for providing healthcare to our rural citizens.

Dear friends, what did you learn from the these three inspiring lives. One Doctor who left his money spinning foreign job came down to village and created an innovative cooperative movement leading to the birth of a low cost high quality rural hospital, another Doctor who grown up in a rural environment

with a value system inspired by his father as a role model gave the world an innovative eye care system to remove the avoidable blindness; the other doctor who has taken up the tribal healthcare system as his mission and created an innovative healthcare model in the rural setup. The message is if you have a great vision, that dream will not allow you to sleep but will keep you awake till you achieve that mission. I hope every one of you will set a great vision in your career.

Let me give some of the innovation in healthcare research leading to solutions for the diseases which were almost incurable so far.

#### Innovative Cancer Vaccine Development

In April 2010, while in Louisville in USA, I met researchers from Brown Cancer Research Center who are developing a vaccine for cervical cancer which affects many women in the nation. A World Health Organisation study reveals that every year 132,000 women are diagnosed with this particular kind of cancer and nearly 75,000 die from the disease. The proposed vaccine would be developed on protein drawn out of tobacco leaves and would cost nearly \$2 for every individual. I am sure, the healthcare community assembled here would like to take up development in such areas of societal importance.

Since all of you are now going to engage in your mission to be the future leaders of healthcare, let me now discuss with you a unique hospital which I saw in Lexington USA.

## University of Kentucky Healthcare Centre

Friends, in the last month, I was in USA for some teaching assignments at various universities and other programmes. On 15 of April 2010, I visited the University of Kentucky Healthcare centre which is a one billion dollar hospital with the best of healthcare of all kinds for the people of the state of Kentucky.

Dr. Michael Karf, the chief designer of the whole hospital, showed me around the under construction building. Dr. Karf introduced the hospital to me as “a visionary healthcare center of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. I observed, how the grand hospital was more than a symbol of the best medicare technology, it carried a message of compassion for the patients of all ages and conveyed hope to the ailing heart and brought smile to the sad faces. The hospital, of course had the best medical equipments, but it was also aesthetically designed with large windows, beautiful atrium decorated with beautiful paintings and games for children. The patient when he or she enters the hospital, gets a message of confidence “I will be healed”. At the same time, while the hospital was state of art, it still provided for further space for later technological advancement by having high ceilings and wide doors. Why I am saying this, is because some innovative doctors will come out of this gathering and will be pioneering unique healthcare centers which bring together medicine and compassion.

## Conclusion: Six virtues of a healthcare giver

When I am with the healthcare community, I would like to share an experience with Choakyi Nyima Rinpoche, the Chief Monk in Kathmandu and a medical researcher. After nearly a kilometer of walk, I reached the white Kumbha where the chief Monk and his disciples were waiting to receive me. After reception the Chief Monk said, let us go to our study room and I followed him. He climbed the first floor, the second floor, the third floor, the fourth floor and the fifth floor, just like a young boy. Probably the life style has a positive impact on the mind and body. All along I was following and following. When I reached his chamber, I saw a laboratory and a spiritual environment overlooking the Himalayas. What surprised me was, his research students come from different parts of the country. Particularly he introduced me to his co-author David R Shlim, MD who is working on a research area, Medicine and Compassion. The Chief Monk Choakyi Nyima Rinpoche and myself exchanged few books. The Monk has written with Dr. David R. Shlim a book titled "Medicine and Compassion". I liked this book and read it during my journey from Kathmandu to Delhi. This book gives six important virtues which a medical practitioner has to possess towards their patients.

First virtue is generosity; the second virtue is pure ethics; third is tolerance, fourth is perseverance, fifth is cultivating pure concentration and the sixth virtue is to be intelligent.

These virtues will empower the care givers with a humane heart. I am sure; all the young students graduating today from the Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University will inculcate these values.

Dear friends, Today before you go to bed, take a paper and write this question, “What I will be remembered for?”. Will I be remembered as one of the great doctors of the nation in a particular field, or will I remembered as a pioneer in creating unique healthcare center bring brings a confluence of compassion and medicine, or will I be remembered as a pioneering life scientist for discovering vaccines against HIV, malaria or cancer, or will I be remembered as a great doctor who went to the villages and changed the healthcare system for a million people. If you are able to write an answer for this question in a page, who knows that page may be one of the pages the posterity will ever keep referring in the years to come.

Dear young doctor friends, graduating today is a beautiful event of the journey of your life. The real destination of you life, will transpire, when you ask a question what I will be remembered for?

Once again congratulate the Graduating Students. My best wishes to all of you for delivering the best of healthcare to everyone through knowledge, hard work and integrity.

May God Bless you.

## Oath for medical professionals

1. I love my medical profession a noble mission.
2. I will follow the motto “Let my care, remove the pain and bring smiles”.
3. I will always radiate cheer to give confidence to patients and their families.
4. I will be a life long learner, I will practice what I learn and I will train my team to be competent.
5. I will deliver quality care with high standards irrespective of whom I am treating.
6. I will not introduce any diagnostic pain.
7. I will work with integrity and succeed with integrity.