



In the aftermath

Shailesh Rajaram Deshpande, MD (Preventive and Social Medicine)

Department of Education, Chellaram Diabetes Institute, Pune

Corresponding Author:

Dr Shailesh Rajaram Deshpande

Chellaram Diabetes Institute

Lalani Quantum, Pune - Bengaluru Bypass Highway

Bavdhan (Budruk), Pune - 411021, Maharashtra, India

Email: proshade2002 at yahoo dot com

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Today, as I get out of bed I recall yesterday's scene -
what happened, and what might have been -
our hospital became an unintentional stage
and I just got caught up in a theatre of rage.

I had heard stories of violence against healthcare staff,
and that such incidences were on an increasing graph,
but last evening, I got first-hand experience
of an unbridled perpetration of violence...

It all started with an ICU* patient;
his condition was very critical upfront,
having landed in this serious predicament
as a legacy of the referring hospital's treatment.

He was accompanied by a couple of relatives
to whom we explained his grave prognosis;
they had seemed, then, to be willing to accept
that he had a few days, if not hours, left.

He was bad to begin with, and then he turned worse;
things went on a downward spiral, as if like a curse -
one by one, his organs started to fail -
we tried to revive him, but to no avail.

All this while, two became four, then six, eight, ten -
outside the ICU gathered a posse of men.
Surely one couldn't label these people as caregivers
for what followed next gave us all the shivers.

When the RMO** broke to them the bad news,
all at once all hell broke loose -
the fellows alleged we had told them a big lie
and kept demanding "how did our patient die?"

They began to articulate their grouses;
they raised their voice and hurled abuses.
Then, when one of them flexed his arm,
it was a signal of the intent to harm.

As they commenced their witch hunt,
the RMO became the first to bear the brunt.
He was slapped, punched, kicked while on the floor,
then was beaten till he could be beaten no more.

Soon they stepped up their unjustified attack -
the lone guard was no match for this brute pack.
As they smashed the glass and flung the chairs,
I unwittingly ended up in the crosshairs.

There is no such thing as dignity of a woman;
when they come at you, they spare no one.
I was grabbed, pushed and shoved around,
then, someone just threw me to the ground.

They then rushed in search of a new target;
anyone in hospital uniform was to be an outlet.
Everyone else appeared stunned and still;
it took time for them to summon their will.

Some made frantic call after call,
others tried to confront through sheer gall;
a few more guards and then the police patrol,
and the situation was finally brought under control.

When things now appeared to be safe,
suddenly, I became conscious of myself -
my back was hurting, my shoulder was sore;
my pain, my distress, I could suppress no more.

So I wept, I wailed, I poured out my bile,
venting the humiliation pent up all this while;
then, I looked around and could note -
all my colleagues were in the same boat.

Some had broken bones, some had profuse bleeds;
yet a few others were trying to attend to their needs -
my beautiful hospital, now painted an awful picture
with glass strewn around and broken furniture.

The police recorded my statement along with the rest,
then I was asked to go home, probably for the best.
At home, I cried and cried, again and again -
It was great my family stood by me in my pain.

A hot cup of milk and a tranquiliser
worked to put me into some slumber.
Now, as I recollect yesterday's events and actions,
I find myself immersed in a sea of emotions:

Anger, anguish, fear, frustration,
despair, despondency, dejection, desolation;
my heart really quakes and quivers
at the thought of dealing again with such "caregivers".

I chose this profession, it was my calling;
yet what happened yesterday was truly appalling -
violence was not part of our education -
for such eventuality, I had absolutely no preparation.

We try to always put in our best effort -
It is never our intention to offend or hurt.
We don't claim to have a fix for all -
we do commit mistakes, we are mortal after all.

Then why this anger, why this vilification?
For violence, can there ever be justification?
The police assured that justice would be done,
but that is a long road; the journey has just begun.

Now, when I again summon my memory,
I can see my colleagues' uncommon bravery -
how each tried to hold the fort in their own way -
in the face of the challenge, they did not sway.

With their inspired acts they have shown
that I can't possibly let any one of them down;
so now I have decided to attend to my duty;
I will prepare myself to face any eventuality.

I will attend to the patients as always with a smile,
Yet I will remain vigilant all the while.
Maybe among the public there is a feeling of suspicion
but can't it be overcome with good communication?

We have to build bridges before it is too late -
to generate mutual respect in place of hate.
Who takes the first step should not matter,
we have to undertake this journey together.

The efforts have to be backed to the hilt
To see that trust is slowly but surely rebuilt.
I pray the deceased person rests in peace
and hope we will all be able to work in peace.

* ICU: Intensive Care Unit

** RMO: Resident Medical Officer

Poet's disclaimer: This poem was recited at the Literary and Cultural Festival 'Muktangan Kavi Sammelan' organized by the Indian Medical Association on 8th September, 2018, at the Dr. DY Patil Medical College, Pimpri, Pune.