

## **Quackery is still rampant!**

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Quackery is an unscientific, unproven and non established method of patient management. It may or may not have ulterior motives! If there are ulterior motives then it also constitutes a fraud! Quackery had been in practice all over the world since time immemorial. First documented evidence of effective check on Quackery is by Abbasi Khalifa Walid who is also known to have built first modern hospital about 1300 years back. After death of one patient apparently from maltreatment he constituted a medical board composed of competent well reputed physicians of that era and personally headed the board. After through examination the board would issue medical license without which no one was allowed to practice medicine in the vast Muslim land in which sun never set! Those were the most glittering and glorious centuries of history when the West was in dark ages! (Please see "History of Science: History of Medical Licensing" in this issue of IJP!

Apart from financial loses losses, quackery may have serious health consequences including delay in institution of appropriate optimal patient management allowing relentless progress of disease, transforming a potentially curable ailment into an incurable one and complications attributable to effects of quack medicine and at times even sudden death! It's not uncommon to see people losing their precious kidneys due to some "Hakeemi", homeopathic prescriptions and excessive use of pain killers.

We see newspapers publishing all sorts of advertisements full of tall and baseless claims of cure of chronic illnesses! On the other hand multinational companies bring numerous advertisements of products of beautification and growing hair thick and long! Some even claim absorption of proteins through the hair! Many soap manufacturers make claims about killing bacteria based on pseudoscientific data as if these bacteria can't be washed out by simple water and mild soaps and as if all bacteria present on the skin are

harmful! As a matter of fact dermatologists find these harsh soaps more harmful to the sensitive skin!

Quackery is practiced not only by illiterate but also by some highly educated dishonest doctors who take advantage of despair, hopelessness and misery of patients of chronic illnesses such as terminal malignancy, systemic sclerosis, poliomyelitis and advanced crippling rheumatoid arthritis. Some hospitals promote unnecessary surgeries. Some gynecologists have unjustified very high rate of cesarean sections! Then there are so called spiritual healers, greedy pseudo peers and magicians! They pretend to treat all sorts of physical and psychological ailments!

These are the problems but what are the solutions? The responsibility is on the shoulders of the Government, regulatory bodies, professional organizations, civic society and conscientious individuals! The Government with the help of professional organizations and individuals should bring appropriate laws to effectively curb quackery in its all dimensions and at all levels. The regulatory and professional bodies must play their positive role against quackery. But these bodies first must remove their own deficiencies. These need to be made truly representative by allowing all members to vote through postal ballots as doctors are extremely busy and it's not possible for them to travel long distances and stand in long queues for casting their vote! Unless we make these bodies truly representative and accountable these may remain in the hands of highly manipulative individuals and groups!

Hospitals should follow the guidelines and recommendations of Joint Accreditation Commission and must hold regular morbidity and morality conferences as well as audit of various procedures and use of antibiotics.

Its irony that a large number of doctors leave the country and never return back creating a vacuum that is then filled by quakes! We must stop this brain drain from the country and try bringing back our

doctors with provision of better job environments for them!

It seems that we have reverted more than 13 centuries back when Muslim Caliph Walid instituted the medical licensing.

In developed countries due to their better law & order situation brute quackery may be quite rare but sophisticated quackery is present there to with active participation of multinational drug industry and international regulatory bodies! Bird flu and Swine flu vaccines are sold to a large number of people who do not require them at all. In some 3rd world country hospitals medicines for common

ailments such as tuberculosis, malaria and anemia may not be available but one may find the bird & swine flu vaccines thus depriving masses of their basic health needs!

In order to effectively curb quackery mere laws and regulatory bodies are not sufficient! It's absolutely necessary to instill high moral and ethical values in our curricula; both for health workers and non healthcare workers! Media must be tightly regulated banning promotion of all sorts of quackery. We need to effectively implement laws! Quackery is a big monster today engulfing health and lives of many and it's our responsibility to root it out completely.