

Palliative care: the integration of modern science and the ancient spiritualism



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Dear Sir,

In this era of rapid changes in epidemiological trends among populations brought on by the advent of newer technologies having their telling impact on the life styles of people at large, it is of significance to note the changes in disease trends. There is an increasing trend in the number of malignancies being detected [1]. In this context the concept of “palliative care” assumes great relevance. It is not just the patient who goes through the psychological strain of facing the possibility of impending mortality and morbidity but also the family which is with the patient in the whole process. The states of varying degrees of spiritual and existential distress are unavoidable in such cases and need to be studied and addressed on a case to case basis [2].

WHO defines Palliative care as “An approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual”. What is of interest here is that, the spiritual aspect of healing which hitherto was slighted by the minds too steeped in the realms of observational science has been given an important place in the management process. Having gone through a course in palliative care and doing field practice, I have found that the integration of the spiritual aspects, primarily the psychological part into the care, is making a difference in the way life is seen and lived by the patients. The schism between science and spirituality is slowly dissolving into a space for a more comprehensive approach where both are acknowledged and harmonized. The way health care is being delivered to people as a state responsibility and the lessons learnt in its implementation make it very clear that, in the process of health care though the ‘doctor’ is a key factor, there are many other factors involved for a holistic healing to happen. This opens out the possibility of a shared responsibility between the various stakeholders involved in the health care delivery process toward a fulfillment of a common goal in the environment of mutual respect. In this direction there is a lot that needs to be done in India for Palliative Care [3]. The current curriculum for undergraduate medical training has not



included palliative care in its core syllabus. This is something that needs consideration looking at the way the disease distribution is evolving over time and to face the challenges not far into the future. Also there is automatically induced a sense of ethics and morality which is of greatest value to any healer.

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Competing interests

None

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