

Making Of A Medical Teacher

Why does one become a teacher? I know some who became teachers because they loved it. I also know some who did so because it was a job, just like any other job, a means to making a living. After all, there is no rule that one has to find a vocation of one's liking.

How does one become a teacher? No matter what the driving force behind, certain qualifications must be obtained and a certain procedure must be followed for becoming a teacher. To become a school teacher, one has to get a bachelor's degree in a Science or Arts subject, followed by at least a B.Ed. or D.Ed. To become a college teacher, one has to get a master's degree in a Science, Arts or Commerce subject, followed by M.Phil. and Ph.D.

If the education department is so particular about the training and qualifications of teachers who teach in schools and Science, Arts or Commerce colleges, one would expect much more stringent criteria for becoming a medical teacher. However, in contrast to school and college teachers, doctors become medical teachers as a beneficial side effect of getting a clinician's job in a medical college hospital. Perhaps that is so because with an educational methodology degree as a prerequisite, very few doctors would have opted for becoming teachers, and the medical colleges would have a hard time finding faculty.

I remember how I was initiated to teaching. I had just finished two house-posts in Obstetrics and Gynecology and become a Registrar. One fine morning my Boss said, "Shashank, I have to go for an urgent cesarean section in my private nursing home. Take my lecture for the undergraduates at 12.00 non. The topic is normal labor. You should not have any problem teaching that. I had no option. There was no time to plan and prepare the content, no time to prepare teaching aids like overhead transparencies or slides, and no time even to think much about it. This was somewhat akin to pushing someone into deep water as the first lesson in swimming. Luckily for me I turned out be a natural (perhaps not a terrific one, but definitely a natural). The students apparently liked my teaching, and the news reached my Boss. I was entrusted with the responsibility of taking all the remaining lectures of my Boss. I did that and loved it too. I must thank my Boss for making me a teacher.

But is this scientific? We know that a person who has passed the M.B.B.S. examination has at least 50% marks in each subject. Then he becomes a resident doctor, and in his third year of residency, without a postgraduate qualification and without any training in teaching methodology, he becomes a medical teacher. If you don't believe this, check out the post-holding certificate of any resident. It states that the third year posts are teaching posts. After obtaining a postgraduate degree, if one is lucky and desirous, one lands a Lecturer's job. The prerequisites for the job are a postgraduate degree and certain teaching experience as a resident, but no degree or diploma in teaching methodology. This should appear to be highly irregular to anyone, especially to the education department, the medical council and the university. The job entails training future doctors who are going to give health care to people. If any deficiencies are left in their education, the consequences could be catastrophic. Apparently no one seems to mind, or if they do, they are turning a blind eye to it. After all, things have been done this

2 Making Of A Medical Teacher

way for ever, and if the system seems to be working, why change it?

Perhaps it was noticed by the medical council. As an afterthought, it was suggested that the medical teachers attend a workshop conducted by 'medical education technology cell' of the institute, if it has one. If not, they may attend it wherever possible. This is not obligatory. The courses are rather brief, lasting for a week or less. There is a hefty course fee to be paid, a few sessions to be attended, pre- and post-tests (which are not for evaluation of the candidates' performance anyway), and a valedictory function at which participation certificates are handed out. In less than one week's part-time training, one becomes a trained medical teacher. Some of the participants keep running away to see a patient or do a case. Still they get the certificate. A colleague of mine once attended a two-day workshop in which I was faculty. She attended on the first day, did not attend on the second day (saying it was all very s****d), but did get the certificate. She could become faculty for future courses of this nature.

The point is that the methods used for training doctors to be teachers for undergraduate and postgraduate medical students leave much to be desired. The teachers are responsible not only for training the students, but also for their evaluation. Senior members of the teaching staff participate in development of curricula. One wonders how effective they will be in carrying out these duties without adequate scientific training.