

Education without sponsorship

Excerpts from a letter to the president of the Poladpur Medical Association, Poladpur, Raigad, Maharashtra:

I was impressed by the 80 per cent attendance for my talk

on how to start and continue CPR or initial management of cardiac arrest in a rural area. Until now, I have attended more than 50 CMEs, but not a single one was arranged without sponsorship... It was really creditable on the part of doctors practising in remote rural areas, where they are the backbone of rural health care, because in today's era, everything from tea to the toilet is sponsored. I noticed that everybody was taking a keen interest in the lecture...because their minds were not at all diverted as routinely happens in a sponsored conference due to stalls and other things.

Sir, I admire you and your members for the way they have adapted for learning and avoiding becoming slaves of sponsorship. I hope this message is conveyed to all presidents and officials who are putting their major energy into searching for sponsors for medical CMEs.

Yours sincerely,

HS Bawaskar, Mahad, Raigad, Maharashtra

Dr Bawaskar's comment is welcome. Please read the Letter from Sewagram on page 130 for another example of an unsponsored meeting. -- Editor.

Stop press: a landmark judgment

On September 4, 2001, the Bombay High Court held that

accredited members of the press shall be permitted to attend inquiry proceedings conducted by the Maharashtra Medical Council to probe misconduct of medical practitioners. "... MMC cannot hold the view that inquiry proceedings held under Section 22 of the MMC Act of 1965 are confidential in nature and have to be held in camera." (1)

The judgement was in response to a case filed in the early 1990s, by Ms. Saroj Iyer, journalist; the Medico Friend Circle Bombay Group; The Forum for Medical Ethics Society and Lok Hith. The case was filed in relation to a complaint by Mr. PC Singhi to the MMC, against Dr. Prafull Desai, surgeon at the Bombay Hospital. The MMC judged Dr. Prafull Desai guilty of two misconducts, but was punished only with a warning. Ms Saroj Iyer, who was also active in the MFC, was not allowed to witness the proceedings. This judgement will be an important precedent for the presence of witnesses in Medical Council Inquiries. If a journalist is allowed, it should not be difficult for doctors and laypersons to claim the right to witness an inquiry. Are there any takers for such legal action?

Three precedent-setting high court judgments have emerged from MFC's (Bombay Group) campaign on medical malpractice: on registration and standards in private nursing homes (following from the case involving Ms. Yasmin Tawaria), the patient's right to a copy of medical records (Mr. Raghunath Raheja), and, now, allowing journalists to witness an MMC inquiry against doctors (Mr. PC Singhi).

Mr. Singhi's long fight in the civil and criminal courts is still on, and he has won several battles here. Some of these rulings are also precedent setting, and can be used by others. Some have been described in the book documenting MFC's work in Mumbai: *Market, medicine, malpractice*.

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Reference:

1. *Indian Express*, October 22, 2001.

Consumer rights as applied to vaccine usage in India

The eight consumers' rights as defined by the

International Organization of Consumers' Union are as follows :

The right to safety

This means the right to be protected against products, production processes and services which are hazardous to health or life. The right to safety has been broadened to include the concern for consumers' long-term interests, not only their immediate desires. Vaccines introduced in this country are cleared on the basis of foreign trials and data. Safety and efficacy trials on Indian subjects are done in a hurry just before licensing. These trials merely test antibody responses and very few trials monitor adverse reactions over a prolonged period of time