

competent care from their doctors. What often holds people back is the lack of knowledge – what are their rights in a given scenario? How do they go about exercising those rights? One way to encourage awareness of patients' rights is through consumer organisations dedicated to health care who can publish brochures on standards of care and mechanisms of seeking redress when those standards are violated. Patient support groups can promote exchange of information about care given by specific doctors and hospitals. Since the public does not read specialised journals like *Issues in Medical Ethics*, newspaper articles based on real cases of misconduct, showing step by step how a patient can get complaints addressed, would be invaluable. Finally,

the great medium of TV could be utilised to reach even the illiterate.

Health care in India has become a nightmare for not only the poor but also the well-to-do. Where the medical professional is not held accountable, the government lacks the political will to mandate and enforce the necessary reforms, the medical councils only too happy to let things remain the way they are, the patients alone are going to be the engines of change.

#### Reference

1. Doyle Sir Arthur Conan: ***The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Speckled Band*** (1892)

## ADMISSION CRITERIA TO SCHOOL OF NURSING

An outrageous test was conducted on a student nurse who was seeking admission to the nursing course at King George Hospital, Vishakapatnam. In association with this, two gynaecologists, Dr Sasi Prabha and Dr Varalakshmi were found guilty of conducting per vaginal test on the nursing student and have been suspended. This might not have been a single incident which has occurred. Many such cases might have gone unnoticed in the past. We do not believe that such tests should be considered routine tests. To keep up the professional ethics and unity of the nursing profession, and so that such incidents are never repeated in future, it was mandatory for us to check with some of the authorities on nursing on the guidelines for admission to nursing course. (Their names are withheld, at their request).

A senior nurse from Bombay Hospital said per vaginal examination is not at all necessary for admission into the nursing course. A pelvic examination might well be necessary to rule out any other gynaecological or infectious problems and that too only if indicated. She adds that genital examination, mainly scrotal examination is done for candidates appearing for defense services and other such cadres. Some of the medical examinations on admission include routine examinations such as general check-up, chest x-ray and routine examinations of blood. H.I.V. test has also recently been included. This general check up does not include a per vaginal examination or virginity test.

A senior lecturer from the department of nursing, K.E.M Hospital states per vaginal examination is not necessary at all. Most of the schools of nursing admit students who are married. Students with children and widows are also admitted to the course as per the age-limit. If this is permissible, then the question of conducting such tests by a doctor does not arise at all. Even in the past, nurses who were married with children and widowed were admitted to the course. It also mainly depends on the institutional policy that a married student does not become pregnant during the course of study as it interferes with her study. Even if she is pregnant and has to deliver, she can appear for next term of examination -- the only focus being the successful completion of the course.

As the terms and conditions imply so, such attempts to outrage modesty of a person should not be done by any medical authorities for those who seek admission to nursing courses. Other experienced nursing persons suggest that such untoward activities by the medical and non- medical authorities associated with the school of nursing should be brought to the notice of the public and be intimated to the Indian Nursing Council or State Nursing Council so as to seek suitable solutions. There are also the professional bodies such as Trained Nurses Association of India (T.N.A.I) or the Nurses Federation of India who will help in situations such as these. We personally believe that all concerned nursing leaders should seriously take up this matter and formulated specific guidelines on the admission criteria. This will lead to the improved professionalism and to strengthening the ties of nursing so that in future, nurses do not suffer agony or embarrassment out of such activities.

**PRATHEPA JAGDISH, MARIA CARVALHO**

Sister Tutors, Department of Nursing, Tata Memorial Hospital, Parel, Mumbai 400012

#### References :

1. Jayashree M: Virginity test suspensions: doctors up in arms. ***Sunday Mid-Day*** 15 September 1996 p2.
2. Sivanand S: An outrageous test. ***Outlook*** 25 September 1996 p30-31.