

LETTER FROM BANGALORE

IMA meetings: down in the dumps

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The Indian Medical Association, Academy of Medical Specialties (Karnataka Chapter) organized a conference on 'Multispecialties: current scenario' on February 8, 2003. The scientific sessions dealt with trauma care, imaging technology, etc. At the banquet, along with the orchestra came four barely clad girls, suggestively gyrating to the music. This encouraged many doctors to get on to the stage half drunk, try to get close to the dancers and shove money into their hands. Petty squabbles followed. That their own wives were present did not deter the doctors.

Corruption in medical examinations: Can students do anything?

Corruption in examinations ruins the sanctity of the 'guru–shishya' tradition. When money changes hands during the final MBBS examinations which test one's clinical skills and will influence the health of the community—it raises questions about the quality of doctors being trained.

A variety of ingenious means are used. Some prefer the broker system (professionals employ brokers to collect money from hapless patients), while others prefer to do the honour themselves. There have been instances where professors have sent out unofficial notices declaring the amount of money to be paid for the subject for that year. Even good students, terrified at the prospect of failing because of not paying up, spend the days preceding the examinations trying to find out how much and whom to pay.

The following incident took place some years ago in a government medical college before the final year examinations. Over the preceding decade, bribery had become common. As examinations approached, a small group of students decided to make a difference—by not paying the bribe and by making an attempt to break the unholy nexus that existed. A few newspaper reporters were contacted discreetly and the issue was explained to them along with the need for maintaining confidentiality. A series of news reports on the corrupt examination system appeared in these papers over the next few days and activated the college administration. A concerned parent sent a copy of the reports to the Medical Council of India, which immediately faxed a letter to the principal urging

her to take necessary action. Some faculty members (including those who were in the business themselves!) and the principal told the students not to pay up.

Examiners with credible credentials were appointed under the strict supervision of the university and for the first time in years, a 'clean' examination was conducted. The results were not affected in any way and the overall performance of the batch was good. The examination continues to be free of corruption in that college to this day. Sometimes all it requires for an unethical practice to be broken is for somebody to stand up and refuse to be a part of the rotten system.

Another incident portrays the method used by corrupt teachers to collect money. The third year students of a dental college who were to give their internal medicine practical examinations were approached by a broker for the external examiner. The students were asked to get a fixed amount of money in envelopes to a busy street near a temple. The examiner and broker waited in a car with the rear window rolled down. The students were asked to place the envelopes in the back seat of the car before dispersing. This gave the examiner a chance to identify the students who had paid while apparently playing safe by not receiving money directly.

The following day the students who had left the envelopes were passed while most of those who had not were failed. No complaint was lodged and the examiner made easy money. While it is important that the authorities should take utmost precautions to prevent corruption in examinations, it is also for the students not to be sucked into the vortex of corruption.

Transplant facts

The Karnataka State Authorization Committee has only rejected four out of over 2000 applications it has received. In Tamil Nadu, a *Frontline* exposé in July 2002 revealed that the Authorization Committee had not kept a record of the applications received and had only rejected one application among the scores received the previous year. Surprisingly, the Act mentions that a record need not be kept if the application is accepted but a detailed record has to be maintained with reasons if the application has been rejected.