THE ART OF HOLISTIC CARE

Respect and encouragement

He is called to the emergency room of a rural hospital late in the evening. The young woman with acute dyspnoea is already receiving treatment. He soon discovers that she had neither bronchospasm nor cardiac failure. He pauses and thinks, 'What is going on? After a while the patient starts talking about her suffocating situation at home. She is newly married, with a husband working away from home. She is living with the in-laws and having to share the husband's income with the whole family, including five children from a previous marriage, a daughter who disappeared with a new husband.

In consultation with the concerned accompanying relatives, he decides to admit the patient for the night. The family are aware now that the patient is ill, but this illness is part of a situation that will have to be faced by all of them. The doctor will see them on a follow-up visit soon.

In another rural hospital the superintendent tells him how they have identified a room in each ward where the doctor can have individual consultations where privacy is ensured.

These stories came up in a recent training session discussing the principles of family medicine in response to the question: what is family medicine all about and what difference can it make? Both of these doctors have been on the family medicine course for less than six months.

Why tell these stories? I want to share the hope and inspiration that I got from them and what I learned from them. I learned a few things about respect:

- respect for the patient
- the family
- respecting the complexity of life
- the ability of people to face their own difficulties
- their ability to make sense of their own lives
- the doctor
- self-respect: I can care properly for this person
- respect for the body:
- proper clinical examination
- assessment and management
- healing the body can recover

Respect translated into action:
- learning and the courage to change
- things become different
- excitement!

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