

Voice of a doct-her

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My dear young fellies and fellows,

It is my privilege to share my joys and concerns in being a woman doctor. It is a common observation amounting to cliché that my young fellies generally have been outnumbering my fellows in competitive exams held for medical aspirants. This tsunami of young women aspiring for medicine has painted our profession pink much to the dismay of thinkers in the UK for what they consider an unfair skew in medical admissions. It is indeed true that all over the world the number of men seeking a career in medicine has doubled while that of women has increased tenfold. The situation in India is at par with other countries.

This certainly was not the case till just a few decades ago. When Dr Anandibai Joshi dared to study medicine in a foreign land, she was met with a stiff opposition. She had to make a public statement that she would retain her religious and dietary beliefs even when studying in foreign land. Believe me when I say that Indian parents hide a concern similar to Dr Anandibai's kin when they send their daughters to study medicine; for medical colleges are few, geographically remote from their homes and house a cosmopolitan environment different from their upbringing. So what brought about this change in mindset? It is because of a simple awe and respect to our profession that demands intellect, skill and compassion along with hard work, the qualities they know their children inherently possess.

Medicine treats its aspirants equally and places the same challenges and fruits in their paths. Our university convocations again are decorated by many young women doctors bagging coveted prizes and medals.

At this juncture there appear two diverging roads. My young fellies, you will be forced to choose the well-trodden path of marriage over residency as

marriage means 'settling down' in our society. Do not let your competitive spirit be sapped slowly even as you see your fellows feverishly train for their postgraduate entrance exam. Don't lose heart, choose prudently. You remind me of Maa Durga when you join residency. You work hard for your patients and your own learning sincerely, even as you struggle to balance work with your newly wedded homes. Duties during residency stretch over unforgiving hours, while your own pregnancy or an infant at home cry for your attention. I implore that you should not give up medicine at this stage as most women doctors do because I know you have the stuff in you to achieve this delicate balance. Most of the institutes offer supporting crèches too.

You would have noticed your senior women doctors choosing their residency subjects in a stereotypical manner. Women doctors prefer subjects with predictable working hours like dermatology or pathology to those with unpredictable working hours like general medicine. They also choose people oriented branches like Pediatrics, Family medicine over 'agentic' branches such as Orthopedics or Neurosurgery. You may have felt that these patterns in choice reflect the physical, intellectual and emotional suitability of your seniors. However stereotypes are meant to be broken. Medicine does not intend to nurture gender inequalities.

I know that you have read medical literature where women doctors from other parts of the world write about smaller emoluments for equal work and a glass ceiling that prevents their growth in academic careers. You must have also read about the reversal in ratio of practicing doctors favoring men. But you belong to the generation next. You are smart and know your worth, so you will be discussing your salary and career advancement with your employers effectively. And fear not while assuming a leadership role. After

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all what you do is patient care and learning that involves many people. Many studies have proven that mortality rate of patients cared for by women physicians is less in comparison to men physicians. My young fellows belong to the generation next too.

They are accommodative, understanding and smart, and work for healing just as you do. Together you will make the world a better place for the entire human race. Best wishes for your future career and holistic growth

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