

Self care among Health Professionals

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As of 2019 A.D.; 21,033 doctors and 2,718 dental surgeons are Nepal Medical Council (NMC) registered (January);¹ and 55,009 nurses are registered in Nepal Nursing Council (NNC) (June).² The list of Nepalese Health professionals also includes many other Health and allied Science professionals. The record of Dean Academics, B. P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS) shows that it has produced 1,370 MBBS doctors, 578 BDS doctors and many other Health professionals by 2019 A.D.³ Many of them are serving in Nepal and some abroad. The Health professionals make a small chunk of population and take care of health of other people in various ways; i.e. promotional, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and investigational activities. Working day and night with people and government; they talk and teach about health, advocate and fight for people's health, devote themselves into the investigation and search for health, treat ill people and raise the voice for the rehabilitation of rejuvenated people. The quest for health of people is continuous unending process. But, what about the health/ well-being of one of main stakeholders of this movement, i.e. Health professionals themselves? Do we Health professionals take care of the self in true sense?

When we join health/ medical profession, knowingly or unknowingly, we enter into a vocation which calls for the service of others,

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mainly sick people. We Health professionals earn and keep trying updating our health/ medical education/ knowledge base, go through its standards and sets of examinations, build and maintain a special relationship with our clients based on ethical principles. We tend to forget the essential component while searching everything else but an age old Epitaph of an Athenian doctor of A.D. 2 reminds us that when are to serve others. 'These are the duties of a physician: First... to heal his mind and to give help to himself before giving it to anyone else.'⁴ If and only if we Health professionals are physically, mentally and socially fit, we will be in position to contribute fruitfully in professional activities; i.e. service, academic, research and policy making. But are we? Are we ourselves one of the factors behind the failure of the WHO definition of the health which is often described as utopian target?

We are supposed to better know, learn and follow the healthy ways. Do we? Our medical students and interns are reported to use psychoactive substances, not less but more than general people.⁵ Our observations also show that health science students and professionals suffer more from mental ailments.⁶⁻⁷ Physical problems are also reported higher, e.g. low back pain (LBP) among nurses. We need more and more intensive studies looking into this. We may have lots of excuses for not following healthy life styles though we are exposed to a set of particular professional hazards in addition to general health risks of our time. Frequently, I say there is no time for exercise, meditation

or other health behaviors. Violence against health professionals are there alongside.

Whether our behaviors are healthy or not? It will be evident if we consciously observe in our workplaces, offices, class rooms, quarters/ home and around. How do we behave with others, how do we sit, how do we spend our leisure time, how do we enjoy in parties, what do we do with waste materials (do we throw indiscriminately), how do we drive? Though doctors and other medical/ health professionals are or are supposed to be aware about the facts about and measures of healthy life, it seems, many of us fail to pay attention to self-care.

Because of our tendencies to neglect healthy life styles, there goes a common saying, 'Do not see what doctor does him/ herself but listen what s/he says'. But, we need to remember that we will get the fruit of same seed that we plant and grow. No one will be in position to change the fate. Only we can and that too, if we do in time! Not only higher prevalence of mental and physical morbidity, but also at times, unbearable painful situation arises with consequent premature deaths and disabilities of Health professionals.

If not more, health of the Health professionals is as important as that of others. Though relatively small portion of population, we Health professionals are among the most watched and modeled by others. I come across many patients and their family members who point out doctors smoking or drinking while I counsel for the abstinence. Along with the general consequences of unhealthy life styles, illness, disability and death; there might be some more specific consequences with these adversities

among Health professionals. We realize what happens to the clients when a care provider or Health professional him/ herself becomes the victim of suicide or premature death or disability..... a deep sense of pessimism among clients and irreparable void in the profession! Hence, time and again, professionals' health/ wellbeing has been pointed out as a founding component of professional mansion as depicted by Dewey and Swiggart.⁸

For the holistic health of a clinician and Health professional, all dimensions of health should be paid due attention. We need to be aware and alert to the components of our health and wellness; i.e. Self-care, Stress and Burnout, Emotional intelligence, Family systems, Training experiences inclusive of hidden curriculum, Coping skills, Conflict management and Personality types. For the holistic health, one needs to take care of body, mind, emotion, soul and spirit. Dewey advocates seven key areas for the self care of Health professionals: 1. Sleep, 2. Balanced meals, 3. Physical activity, 4. Socialization/ hobbies, 5. Vacations/ down times, 6. Spiritual engagement and 7. Having a personal physician.⁹ With advancement of technology and modernization and better affordability, life of Health professionals will be efficient, our family will have more leisure time, and we will have to be careful also about the tendency to inactivity and materialistic gain/ hoarding for pleasure, rather than true happiness. Activity schedule, time management, conscious deep breathing, adequate fluid, preparedness for adverse situations, personal hygiene, judicious digital/ technology use, clean environment, congenial relation with others and

family life are equally justified for we Health professionals as well. Let's not forget the need of self-care. In true sense, holistically healthy Medical/ Health professionals will be model to others. We need to strive for health for ourselves and for others as well. If we ourselves do not take care, who will?

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