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MISGUIDED NIGHTINGALES

Our nurses are at it again. This time they want the Government to treat them as 'professionals'. This is after University academic staff and doctors were given a 25 percent increment in their professional (or on-call) allowance in the budget. The Government Nursing Officers Association President Saman Rathnapriya interpreting the increase wrongly says that doctors will receive a 25 percent salary increment in addition to the five percent pay hike granted to all public servants including nurses.

Going by the logic of GNOA President then the nurses should also receive the same salary as doctors. Isn't this ridiculous? Can nurses equate themselves to doctors by any stretch of the imagination? Noble as the nursing profession may be at best it could be described as a support service in the medical profession.

Doctors on the other hand are the real healers who have achieved their skills and expertise after going through the mill first as university graduates, medical college, internship all of which takes years to complete. Not only that to acquire the skills of specialists, doctors would have to undergo another rigorous period of study and training all of which takes a good part of their adult lives.

Nurses do not have to undergo such a taxing regime. In fact an entrant to the nursing profession do not need to have even the basic academic qualifications demanded for some of the mundane jobs around. They usually learn on the job, of course after going through nursing school and obtaining the necessary training. The educational and professional attainments between doctors and nurses therefore do not even stand scrutiny.

Therefore nurses can by no stretch of the imagination be justified in asking to be treated as doctors least of all be tagged as professionals. Perhaps the nursing fraternity themselves are cognisant of this but has made this unreasonable request purely as a tactic to win benefits.

Also there is bound to be a chain reaction if this request is granted. Ordinary mechanics will be asked to be treated as engineers. Clerks would seek the title of accountants, masons will be wanted to tagged as architects and the list could go on. They would all want to be treated as professionals and perhaps enrol with the OPA. Hence the demand of the nurses could be treated as funny if not serious.

Nurses have had a running battle with doctors in recent times and there is little love lost between the two factions. The demand by certain nursing grades to be given titles that would not make them subordinate to doctors' orders is a case in point. The GMOA resisted this special Nurses Minute and threatened Trade Union action.

Now we have the nurses wanting to be treated on par with the doctors themselves. This clash of egos if allowed to continue can only have serious consequences to the patients who will be caught in the direct crossfire of the warring factions.

The Health Minister should step in to ensure this latest issue does not get out of hand. The GNOA has already threatened

TEN YEAR
PRESIDENTIAL
INITIATIVE FOR
TRILINGUAL SRI
LANKA:

Promoting English as life skill

People thought that English was for the elite. And the elite used it as a sword - in Sinhala it is kaduva. The elite used knowledge of English as a kaduva to cut down the others from the villages. This was very prominent in high society, especially in Colombo; they thought the people who didn't know English must be somebody to be looked down upon. Now it has changed and we want to change this attitude

► FULL STORY

On poor 'undersiding' of an embroidery

A telephone conversation floats down the year 1990. I can't remember whether I made the call or if Kanishka Goonewardena did. He was in Los Angeles and I in Boston. We were both students and both having a tough time with respect to heart-matters.

► FULL STORY

Education - Not the monopoly of brightest

Education then is not just a passage to employment or a livelihood as we have been accustomed to view but a means that adds luster to a person's talents augmenting his capabilities, for the greater good of the society and human civilization.

► FULL STORY



Trade Union action if their demand is not met. The Minister therefore should find a way out of the impasse for the sake of patients. Needless to say the doctor- nurse cooperation is extremely vital for effective patient care. If nurses take an adamant stand and act insolently riding rough shod over doctor's orders the entire healthcare system is bound to collapse.

We are here not casting any aspersions on nurses or belittling their profession which is indeed a noble one. But there are certain boundaries it should not cross. Demanding to be treated on par with doctors is certainly out of the question. And this is certainly not an issue for which Trade Union action is called for. It is a prestige battle between two professions for which the public should not suffer. We say this because the doctors will certainly resist any further concession granted to the nurses the way things are between the two parties. The doctors will want to jealously guard their professional turf. This time though they may be justified in doing so. In fact this running battle between doctors and nurses would only draw the contempt of the general public towards the parties at war. Therefore it is best that they settle their disputes amicably lest both sides lose the respect and honour attached to their respective professions.

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