

From Editor's Desk:

The death of a little girl exposes an ethical hole

The buck-passing phenomenon that arose from the recent scandal in December 2004 involving a severely abused four-year-old girl surnamed Chiu, reflects the gravity of the problems plaguing Taiwan's medical community. Little Chiu was taken to a municipal Taipei hospital for severe head injury yet was forced to transfer to a smaller hospital a hundred miles away.

It also signals that, without genuine reforms to the nation's medical education system, the quality of healthcare for everyone will only continue to deteriorate.

The crucial aspect of this incident does not derive from whether there were enough beds at the hospital that initially refused to treat the young Chiu.

The crux of the problem is the lack of medical ethics of certain doctors, such as the two at the center of this scandal, who did not bother to examine the girl's CAT scans before insisting she be transferred to hospitals elsewhere.

This total neglect of medical ethics should be universally deplored.

If doctors were in fact business people, they could reserve the right to deny service, and customers would be free to go elsewhere to obtain the service they required. And neither side would be at fault.

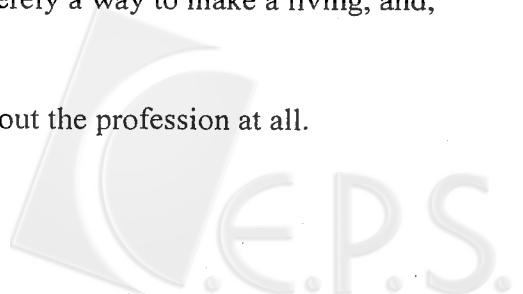
But contrary to the opinion of some, it seems, doctors are not business people, and medical services cannot be regarded as commodities.

Historically, doctors were revered for their life-saving skills, and like priests, they were dedicated to helping those in need even when there was no expectation of payment for services rendered.

Over time, as this society has become more and more materialistic, the medical profession has ceased to be a special vocation.

Some doctors now seem to view the profession as merely a way to make a living, and, for many, a very handsome living at that.

To some doctors, it seems, there is nothing sacred about the profession at all.



Previous praise of the virtues of doctors has quickly disappeared with the advent of a new generation of doctors who see the profession only as a job.

Although there are still doctors willing to devote their lives to helping people, they are a minority, and what we see nowadays can only make us lament the demise of medical ethics.

Over the years, the importance of medical ethics has been emphasized in a doctor's medical training. But rather than instilling the essence of compassion, medical ethics has gradually become merely another field of study. You can even earn a doctorate in medical ethics. The knowledge of a discipline of bioethics and a genuine compassionate care given by a health professional by the bedside are two different things. Which one do we intend to accomplish?

Although advances in medical science means that ethics cannot focus on compassion exclusively, the kind of ethics that the nation needs now is more important than discussions about the ethical questions involved in methodology, stem-cell research and the like..

Medical students here are all masters of performing well in school, but their excellent grades do not necessarily make them good doctors.

In order to make a good doctor, character, personality, values, affinity and compassion are all required.

The young girl in this incident has lived a life of hardship. God has mercy on her.

We hope that this medical negligence will serve as a wake-up call to doctors and medical educators to reflect on what they do.

How do we cultivate, encourage and support a good doctor given the money-driven society we live in?

It is clearly time for changes in our society.

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