

QUACKERY: DO WE JUST SIT BACK?

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Every profession as has its origin steeped in traditions of yore. Dentistry is no different. Though it's origin is somewhat obscure, there is proof that dental pain has existed as far back as some 250 million years ago. The birth of modern dentistry as we know of was much later, as far back as the early 1800s. Infact, in many instances the year 1839 has been called the 'birth of organized dentistry'. Earlier, "dental treatment" were being carried out by barbers. Is it not coincident that the framework of a modern dental chair so resembles a barber's chair? Our country has it's own traditions, we are so steeped into it in our everyday lives, that we even have a toothache god. Worshipping whom our tooth maladies ought to disappear.

"Man is a creature of habit," most of our decisions have been influenced by what we have been used to. Career is no different; we generally pursue the careers of our fathers, mothers or any member of our family. In our country we have artisans whose family have been in their respective professions for generations. That is good as it gives continuity to the art. The dental profession too is an art and science pertaining to the head and neck region. The difference arises here, in this profession, following one's forefather's footsteps without formal training, does not give anyone divine right to 'play God' in a poor unsuspecting person's oral cavity. Most of such "family" of dentists reside in the kilagal, nagal and bange muda areas. In times of yore, they were instrumental in delivering dental treatment to the public at large. Many of my own relatives have benefited from their ministrations.

One cannot miss reading the ostentatious signboards of "Dental Clinic" scattered in the main thoroughfares of our city. They advertise confidently of all kinds of services available from simple to minor oral surgical processes, and orthodontic treatments. Many just write, 'all kinds of dental

treatments provided.' Who are they? They mostly are former dental assistants who have been trained as a dental assistant in the dental professional's clinics. Some have done an 18-month course in the CTEVT prescribed course for dental assistants. Many just have practical knowledge as they follow the 'see can do' credo of life! Many of their "clinics" are swankier than a proper dental clinic. Some of them are so successful that the technicians at the dental laboratories are being commissioned more work from them than the dental professional! It is to be noted that legal dental practitioners must be registered in the Nepal Medical Council.

The Hippocratic oath says, "first do no harm," so how can we sit tight and allow illegal practices to take place under our very nose? There are instances of such clinics running next to one run by a dental professional that is devoid of patients while the other is jam-packed! There are laws preventing such practices and is being governed by the HMG Nepal, but unfortunately does not have teeth in them. Illegal practice is a double-edged sword; it is imperative to understand that such practices are important in places where there are no dental surgeons. But once again, it should be carried out solely in an attempt to relieve pain and spread oral health awareness amongst the rural population. Once pain is relieved, the patients should be referred to the nearest hospital providing dental treatment.

Let us think for a moment, if the general population likes to visit such places for treatment, what can we do? How does one forget all reasons and do things that do not have any logical answer. One important way of righting this wrong is by awareness. There has to be messages issued in the public interest, outlining the differences between a licensed dental professional and a non-licensed, unqualified dental personnel. Visiting a qualified dental professional is definitely beneficial. He/She can diagnose the

underlying problem immediately and advise the best course of treatment. What about the unqualified personnel, how is he/she going to justify the treatment given is the best remedy? At best the poor patient will be administered what is known as a blunderbuss therapy!

Finally I would like to say, is it the cost factor that prevents people from seeking the services of a professional dental surgeon? How is it advantageous financially to compromise on healthcare? Would you knowingly buy rotten vegetables because they are cheaper than the good ones? There are hospitals, both government and public giving quality dental treatment at affordable prices, there is a teaching hospital, a lot more choices than our forefathers ever had. The bottom line is, do you consider your teeth as important as the rest of your body, if yes, would you not ensure it's best possible care/treatment. If the answer is no, then I am definitely barking up a wrong tree.