

Aspects of Professional Philosophy*

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My theme today is to approach professional responsibility from a more philosophic point of view. We all know what a professional person is expected to do in the execution of his responsibilities towards the public and his professional brethren. I wish to deal with a more fundamental approach to the whole matter which can be styled as the basis on which our behaviour depends.

Every mortal must be puzzled and amazed by the vastness of the universe. We all know that in our solar system there are nine planets, the nearest to the sun being Mercury, Venus, our Earth and Mars. Next comes the Asteroid belt which is about 150 million miles across and then come Jupiter with its strange 'eye', Saturn with its halo, Uranus, Neptune and the furthest, Pluto. These planets make man look rather small, in fact the distances emphasize man's insignificance.

On the other hand, we know about the smallest constituent of matter, the atom, which consists of a nucleus and electrons which determine all the functions of the atom and the molecules. The electrons are very important to science but the nucleus still retains its status as basic ingredient. If one were able to put together the nuclei of hydrogen to form the size of a thumb, it might well weigh 300 000 million tons.

I am using the background of the greatness of the universe purely for comparative purposes, and I am fully aware of the fact that such infra-structure, if scientifically analysed, might present assailable technical problems, viewed through the critical eye of the pure scientist.

Responsibilities

Professional responsibility in the medical sciences is practically all-embracing, but it must still be fitted into the framework of the small as well as the large.

The Council's main responsibilities concern education, registration and discipline and also these general age-old principles, which are so important in a general approach towards our responsibilities.

To deal briefly with the general approach, one can say that the only important basic ingredient is service to mankind, to the public.

Everyone may aspire to freedom and is entitled to it, but there can never be freedom of any kind, not even in the professional sense, unless it is compatible with the laws of our country and the traditions of our professions.

Our duties and our responsibilities are governed by the common law, by our ethical standards and the tradition of our professions and by the unwritten laws of common decency towards others.

It boils down to loyalty and humility when regard is had to the insignificance of the minute atom as part and parcel of a greater universe.

If we do not recognize this, history will look down upon our achievements, however meritorious they may have been, with unspeakable disdain which can never be good for our ego or our status in society.

Professional Duty

Professional duty really starts with the family unit, the smallest of human relationships. This is the atom of adult life. Around this is woven responsibility towards the wider circle of commitments, to larger communities and to greater ideals. If the basic ingredient of family loyalty and good will is lacking, the greater potential of achievements is liable to suffer.

Even the small unit when unstable, or made unstable, can cause great disasters to integrity. In science we have atomic explosions. Similar explosions at the human level can have as far-reaching effects as atomic fission and nuclear explosions.

Professional behaviour is, by the very nature of life, very short, and the best should be made of active productive life. For years, the newborn is unaware of its existence. Many years are wasted in sleep and retirement and only a short span remains for the exploitation of the prime function of all of us, the well-being of the general public. Unproductive retirement seems to be against our period of brief awakening when it is man's duty to serve humanity.

In my opinion, fame and funds are great infiltrators in the real objectives of life and professional behaviour, especially when used for personal aggrandizement. Morality and justice never lean on riches, fame and senility for their existence.

Tradition is one of man's greatest accomplishments. Our professions are very liberal in this regard and hold on to traditions, sometimes at their own expense when regard is had to public feeling.

We must remember that tradition is philosophy and not a law and can never really be a law, but it can always be something to lean on; something to give us guidance and hope; something to save us from many unworthy acts.

It is a great tradition, for instance, to take the family on a holiday. Most people do this. It is, however, unrealistic to prescribe the manner in which a holiday should be enjoyed. It is wrong to enforce the mode of travel by ox-wagon of times gone by when other modes of travel by road, sea or air are available. The tradition of rest is not altered by details. It is thus a duty to keep moving with the present and take out of the past that which is not an impediment to progress.

The behaviour of our professional men of today must take cognizance of the scientific developments achieved through hard labour by our predecessors.

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The concept of the large and the small in human relationships must by the very nature of things remain unpredictable. The smallest influence on the small as well as the large may cause enormous variations. It is almost impossible to conceive of a normal human being; such individual may ultimately only exist in imagination and mental asylums. Mankind is never free of the stresses and strains arising from the concepts of the small and the large. Even wild animals are confined to their abodes for purposes of food and drink.

We can find examples in everyday life. Intelligence without stupidity is as valuable to mankind as an aspirin for a virus pneumonia.

In our dealing with others we cannot accept ourselves as superior simply because we have behaved in a less explosive manner. This would be tantamount to a cynical disregard for justice.

Punishment

Of course we must punish others when regard is had to all the circumstances of what is fair and honourable. But punishment meted out can never entrench one's personal feeling of righteousness. The punishment must be divorced from our personal feelings of what is punishment and what is self-aggrandizement.

We all have an opinion about what is right and what is wrong and we even have the right to inflict our views on others. Punishment is part and parcel of responsibility as long as it does not forever entrench one's personal feeling of superiority.

Hypocrisy plays a great role in professional life. Some persons pose as saviours of mankind and are often idolized for their incidental prowess as doctors. This is like the melodious chirp of a cricket in a churchyard.

Minis have often caused matrimonial mirages and maxis have feathered the nests of economists.

It is one of these human explosions which has turned even professional men into traitors who have displayed unutterable disloyalty to their country. If things went right with this relationship efforts could have been more properly directed towards stopping disease in undernourished areas, to combat hopelessness in pest, flood areas or areas where war leaves unfortunate millions in its wake.

Have the people with ideas of self-satisfaction helped to stop war, hatred and results of disease and drugs?

Have they ever allowed people to live happily in the sunshine of life?

How can anyone ever be victorious spiritually by pushing people around physically?

It is a mortal crime to be disloyal to oneself, one's friends, one's profession and one's country. It is like worshipping the solar system with its planets at the expense of the atom with its nucleus and electrons.

Why should we be side-tracked from our ideologies and be made false to our word, our traditions and our responsibility towards the public?

From the viewpoint of a general approach, there can—to my way of thinking—be nothing wrong in carrying out our functions as reasonable persons towards ourselves, our friends and professions, but above all with humility to mankind, towards the general public.

The above general concept really includes professional behaviour in dealings with the public in the sense of disciplinary matters.

Education

But it goes much further—professional education cannot be divorced from the total concept already referred to.

It is our duty as professional people and of those on Councils like ours to ensure that we keep abreast in training of practitioners, interns, specialists and supplementary health services personnel. We have to amend many of our criteria in the light of modern professional developments.

In certain countries, the minimum curriculum is being drastically reduced, many universities have lost private donations as the result of student unrest. National health and national insurance schemes are being regarded as the ultimate solution of medical and dental care.

Doctors are more and more called upon to render only essential medical services and there is a great tendency to employ more and more assistants and electronic equipment for diagnostic and sometimes therapeutic and research purposes.

The student starts with life as we know it, viz. the newborn baby which is handled as a biological problem since birth.

Nuwe Denkrigtings

Vir ons het dit tyd geword vir nuwe denkrigtings op die gebied van die verdere ontwikkeling van genees- en tandheelkundige dienste en vir die voorsiening van assistente vir die persone in bevel. Dit het werklik onmoontlik geword vir die klein persentasie beskikbare mannekrag om aan al die professionele behoeftes op ons gebied in 'n groot en steeds groeiende gemeenskap te voorsien, veral as in gedagte gehou word ons verantwoordelikhede in die tuislande waar afsonderlike ontwikkeling 'n deel van staatsbeleid uitmaak.

Verlaging van bestaande kwalifikasies word nie hierdeur beoog nie, maar aanvulling daarvan deur aanvullende gesondheids-personeel in die vorm van geneeskundige assistente soos alreeds die geval in die V.S.A., Rusland en die Filippynse eilande is. Ons dokters moet meer hulp en figuurlik gesproke meer hande hê om hulle in staat te stel om tred te hou met die versnelde tempo van professionele verantwoordelikhede. Sodanige hulp is nie alleen nodig vir die tuislande nie maar ook vir die miljoene stadsbewoners van veelvuldige etniese groepe.

'n Vermeerdering van hulpsdienspersoneel sou die ideaal wees, maar op sigself sal dit onvoldoende wees om die bestaande en die ontwikkelende tekorte genoegsaam aan te vul en die hoof te bied.

Wat ons nie-Blankes betref, bestaan daar steeds en verries daar gaandeweg meer fasiliteite vir opleiding van sodanige personeel.

Daar bestaan alreeds na my mening genoegsame gronde vir die daarstelling van 'n Bantoe-instituut van Tegnologie (B. I. T.) vir die doeleindes van opleiding van geneeskundige en tegnologiese assistente op die gebied van fisika, ingenieurswese en ander. Ons is almal bewus van die groot rol wat 'n M.I.T. in die V.S.A. speel waartoe toegang somtyds

selves moeiliker is as tot universiteite. Indien daar 'n soortgelyke instituut alhier opgerig word, kan selfs buitelandse personeel gewerf word om ons goedgesindheid aan die dag te lê. Dit moet egter begryp word dat ek nie hiermee 'n algemene verandering van standaarde in die gedagte het nie en dat dit nie die verwerping van die erkende grade en kwalifikasies wegneem of vervang nie. Dit moet in die werklike sin as aanvullend beskou word.

Regeringsbeleid

Ek verkeer ook geensins onder die illusie dat die saak as sulks by hierdie Raad alleen tuishoort nie. Die hele aangeleentheid is m.i. onderworpe aan Regeringsbeleid selfs wat die praktiese uitvoering daarvan betref. Dit is maar 'n gedagte wat by een of ander geleentheid onvermydelik aandag sal moet geniet. Hoe gouer dit plaasvind, hoe bevorderliker sal dit wees vir die verdere ontplooiing van geneeskundige en aanverwante dienste.

Daar is voldoende aanduiding in die alledaagse lewe dat waar klein sake nie die nodige aandag geniet nie, grotere mikpunte skade berokken word. Professionele diens op alle vlakke is van die konsep van die kleinere en die grotere afhanklik vir die behoorlike lewering van goeie diens aan die algemene publiek.

Etiese of gedragsreëls het ook as grondslag die welsyn van die pasiënt. Die reël as sulks is nie van deurslaggewende betekenis nie maar dit is van waarde vir die professionele persoon om sy verantwoordelikhede teenoor sy medemens behoorlik uit te voer en sy pligte teenoor sy

professionele broers behoorlik na te kom. Dit sou m.i. verkeerd wees om die reëls alleen as voorgangers van tugsake te beskou. Daar steek leiding en diepere waardes in.

Die grootsheid, die onpeilbaarheid en die prag en praal van die sterreheemel en die erkenning van die inherente krag van die atoom en die molekule is rigsgoere vir nederigheid, erkentlikheid, integriteit en menslikheid. Dit beheer bo-alles die professionele man se behandeling van sy pasiënt en sy kollega.

Groot en Klein

Opvoeding van die professionele persoon, die student, die intern, die spesialis en hulpdienspersoneel is gebaseer op ondervinding van die verlede en ook op die ontwikkelinge wat met rasse skrede en versnelde tempo ons aanpassingsvermoë tot 'n uitere mate aandurf. Selfs dit het as grondslag my filosofie van die belangrikheid van beide die kleinere en die grotere.

Haat is nie 'n kompetente amendement van liefde nie. Soepelheid is 'n integrale deel van vooruitgang, sonder prysgee van beginsels en tradisies. Afwesigheid daarvan strem vooruitgang op alle menslike gebiede en pas seer seker nie in my gedagtegang soos hier weerspieël nie.

Professionele persone het baie om op trots te wees en het groot bydrae tot geleerdheid en die welsyn van die mens gelewer. Dit sou m.i. onwys wees om af te wyk van die beginsel van die groot en die klein in die uitvoering van die groot en menslike taak wat op ons skouers rus.