

Thoughts

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Having managed to elude the feeling of being burdened by one's work throughout the cold, dreary winter months, I had hopped into the beginning of my night shift with a rather clear head only to be confronted by a steady stream of individuals who would put any of Chekhov's characters to shame.

One of the blessings (or is it a curse?) of my job is that I come across a spectrum of misery that serves to test the limits of both the human mind and body. It is not uncommon to see health professionals occasionally succumb to the demands that are made of them; not just from the physical exertion of work, but perhaps more importantly and more exhaustingly, from the mental fatigue that plagues people if they are expected to empathise with every facet of a patient's existence.

You can only do this to a certain extent though, as the repercussions of being drawn into this world of misery and discontent without exercising just restraint is inevitably severe. Some of us tend to do this quite well; I try at times to view my cases dispassionately and abstain myself from being too involved in one way or another.

In a way it's a defence mechanism, as I see no benefit in being sucked into a downward spiral that bears no fruitful outcome. In another way though, it is not surprising to feel disillusioned when one deals with an unfortunate number of miscreants who live a capitalist lifestyle, but have come to both rely and misuse a socialist

health system - especially when their grasp of the resources poured into their care and of the lack of similar facilities elsewhere throughout the world is feeble, to say the least.

It is easy to empathise and feel sad for those who have undoubtedly been cursed by the frailty of the human condition – the husband whose body is riddled by cancer, with his wife of 50 years stoically standing by his side; or the child who will never know the love of the father whose life was tragically cut short by a wayward car. It is not terribly easy to sympathise with those at the other end though – the alcoholics, the wife-beaters or the junkies who use the hospital beds as a stop point between each trip to la-la-land.

But ethics demand that we treat each individual with respect, that we perform our duties with no prejudice with regards to not only religion and colour of skin, but perhaps more importantly to his/her choice in leading a life. After all, who am I to judge how someone decides to validate his or her existence?

So I plough through my cases. I bite back my curses, I blink away my tears. I immerse myself in my patients and embrace the chaos of disease during the pitifully few minutes that I spend with them. And I count myself lucky as unlike my patients, I have the option of stepping away from the disease and to sleep soundly at night.