

## Technomedicine

The other day I was reading an article on the advent of technology and the humanity. These are two parallel sides akin to the railway tracks going parallel but never meeting at any point except when crossing over. One can't parallel an example cited in one of the editorials about the care given to a very sick person in a high tech ICU in an upcountry compared with that in the hands of an angel like Mother Teresa who picked up a dying man from a gutter in Kolkata full of maggots in his wounds being taken care of by the Missionaries of Charity. Both died, the difference was the one in ICU died a lonely death amidst the caring but still unconcerned score of nurses around 'some patient' whose family was waiting in the waiting or waiting for the ultimate news unburdening them or waiting for the little glimpse or the care be extended through them in the ICU from which they were kept away; compared to the one who was abandoned by the family, society (whatever remained of that) to die in the gutter but cared for by the 'angels' making the journey to the other world a peaceful and most wanted one. Both aspects can't be ignored.

Technology has brought forth a lot. Perhaps the evening bonfire in the middle of the village took the shape of a movie screened once in a while, even if, for family planning, some fifty years ago to the present everyone in the family glued to the satellite TV or the computer surfing the net and now glued to the multifunctional device wrongly called the cell phone. It does everything you can imagine on this earth and probably beyond that. Can we live without it, perhaps not or maybe better not. Only this evening I was listening to a discussion, if there was no cell phone, would we be able to live, not because our fingers itch to type an SMS or they hurt because we have typed a lot (butter over bread for the physiatrists) or what if there was an emergency, yes, it rings a bell there. Now that we are talking of the 3G which I used to feel that it might be just another gimmick to sell the spectrum and make we people more addicted to SMSing and then video telephony. Think technically, it rings a bell with the phone companies finding another excuse to be in the market earning more or perhaps making the loved son or daughter 'seen' by the loving mother or the lovers making a move to appease the other. But did we think further. The era of the computers, the television and now telemedicine is in. Who says it is a distant dream. It is definitely nearer than the moon or the mission to the moon whenever India is thinking of embarking on one. There is already a weekly clinic going on between AIIMS and the farthest group of islands where people used to be sent for exile until some 60 years ago. People living there are still under the great exile having no doctors

willing to work there thinking that the government has sent them for exile. There, a group of field workers and a couple of odd nurses run a health center and interact with the specialists at AIIMS over teleconferencing and are advised by the doctors thousands of miles away making the best health care made available. They say, telemedicine is very expensive, it takes not less than Rs 360 a minute to make a call this far and then requiring lakhs worth of equipment fixed at both ends. Fine. Can we escape it? Perhaps no.

If we ask the modern day post-graduate, what is Index Medicus perhaps he would stop at the most at the Pub Med and five years down the line even the libraries would not have those much in demand books where all post-graduates, researchers and what not would 'bee' around looking for something not so easy to find compared to the modern day click and get much needed articles. Those who did not come forward lost it all. I am not sure if Index Medicus is still printed these days or not. Can you apply for an American visa without the Internet these days? Perhaps not. Then why Index Medicus.

Somewhere we lost the human touch being occupied by the technology. I still give a lot of email support to all my patients having trouble coming in or travelling, seeking appointments, clarifying doubts keeping the technology alive with human touch and care marrying both. Maybe, when 3G is here and made more popular, the human touch would be better off when patients at an allotted time could 'see' the doctor, show them their progress without having to come all the way to the clinics so far away, specially the one having difficulty commuting due to their restrictions. It won't be as expensive as the present teleconferencing. Can the doctor escape technology? No, better not. Better be net savvy, phone savvy, equipment savvy but never ever leave the most wanted savvy-ness, being patient savvy marrying technology with the human touch. The day is not far when you would have exclusive net conferencing clinics going cheap with the patient with their 3G phone at one end with interface devices making you hear their heart and lungs not to mention their cries but also watch them demonstrate the signs and you advising them over the air with their fee deposited straight into your (or the hospitals) accounts using their mobiles making you and the patients need lesser mobility, a boon to those who are short of that. Be a missionary like Mother Teresa with the gadgets, let's not just run after one track, let's make the two meet in the name of technomedicine with a healing touch, don't run away from it.

*Dr U Singh, Editor*