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CONTENTS

From the desk of the Editor

Main Article

Endoscopic Stapedotomy: A New Dimension to the Conventional Microscopic Procedure 102

Bhaskar Ghosh, Bijan Kumar Adhikary

Vitamin D: A Silent Cofactor for Allergic Rhinitis 107

Rabi Hembrom, Somnath Patra, Rupam Sinha, Indranil Sen, Satadal Mandal, Amit Chakrabarti

Epidemiological Profile of the Head- Neck Pathologies in a Peripheral Referral Institute 113

Sabyasachi Ghosh, Tarak Nath Saha, Indranil Sen

Use of Voice Handicap Index (VHI) as Predictor of Outcome of Non-surgical Treatment in Vocal Nodules 121

Sayan Hazra, Arya Brata Dubey, Arindam Das, Mridul Janweja

Ossiculoplasty using Autologous Reshaped Incus and Teflon PORP: A Comparative Study 129

Ankit Choudhary, Sayan Hazra, Arindam Das, Aryabrata Dubey, Mridul Janweja, Arunabha Sengupta

Effect of Intratympanic Dexamethasone in Idiopathic Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss 135

Rabi Hembrom, Indranil Sen, Bina Tamang, Satadal Mandal, Amit Chakrabarti

Perichondrium - An Autologous Substitute for Temporalis Fascia in Type I Tympanoplasty: A Comparative Study 140

Bahnisikha Kayet, Arya Brata Dubey

Efficacy and Safety of Duckbill Valve Voice Prosthesis in Comparison to Provox 149

Monoj Mukherjee, Siddhartha Das

Determining the Association of Benign and Malignant Salivary Gland Tumours with ABO-Rh Blood Groups 154

Mahbobeh Oroei

Our Experience

Endoscopic Dacryocystorhinostomy : Advantage over External Approach 161

Bijan Basak, Kaustuv Das Biswas, Subhradev Biswas, Ankit Choudhary

Case Report

Mastoid Osteoma 167

Rabi Hembrom, Rupam Sinha, Amit Chakrabarti, Indranil Sen

An Innovative Technique to Repair Cervical Oesophageal Perforation using Oro-oesophageal Tube and AMBU 171

Manish Gupta, Ginni Datta

Cornu cutaneum of Pinna 176

Satish Kumar C, Bharathi K V, Kumaran Ramesh Colbert, Sophia AI

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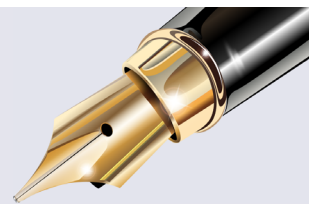
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From the Desk of the Editor



The brutal assault on the doctors at NRS Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata on 12th June, 2019, ignited the flame of anguish of the medical community and resulted in an unprecedented nationwide protest that crippled healthcare services for more than a week all over India. This spontaneous outburst of emotions was not at all surprising as the alarmingly frequent incidents of violence against the medical community have made the doctors of India feel rather disenchanted with their profession. The inability of the Government to take the culprits to task has added to the anxiety of the community. It is not that there is no legal provision against such acts but what we lack is the political and administrative will to enforce the existing laws.

In January 2001, a cardiologist was shot dead in Mumbai by supari killers hired by the aggrieved brother of a patient, who died in 1999, while under his treatment. This incident sent a shockwave through the doctors' community. In the month of August in the same year, a political leader died at Singhanian Hospital, Thane, after a road traffic accident. His supporters went on a rampage and property worth a hundred million rupees was vandalised. The hospital could not be revived and the city lost an entire hospital due to expression of "spontaneous grief." Whenever a patient dies, holding the doctor responsible and assaulting him has become the norm. Violence against doctors have been on the rise since then. The doctors protest but the Hippocratic Oath kicks in and the protesting doctors return to their work, only to be assaulted again.

Violence by patients' relatives, local goons, political leaders and even by the police has been reported widely.¹ Violence, most often, refers to verbal abuse, intimidation and vandalism but the most important difference in violence from that seen in the western world is how quickly the verbal abuse becomes physical assault and vandalism and how rare the effort is from other patients and their relatives or the people in the vicinity to stop it.²

Violence appears to be "a superficial sign of a deeper systemic failure."³ The reason for the rising trend of violence has its social, governmental, administrative, economic and attitudinal aspects. The cost of medical treatment has grown exponentially over the years. The vast majority of the population cannot afford to sustain the "catastrophic expenditure" of private medical care. The dwindling funds of the government healthcare system (less than 2% of the total budget allocated which is 1% of the GDP) and the dearth of doctors (only one hundred thousand doctors are working in the government sector out of nine hundred thousand doctors in the country) have left the government facilities overburdened and ill-equipped to deal with the expectations of the patients and their relatives.

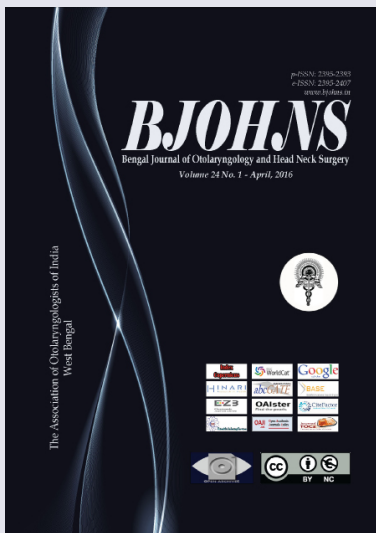
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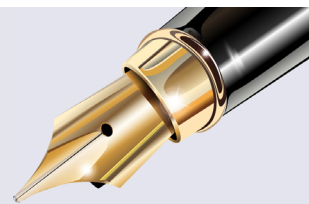
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From the Desk of the Editor



The doctor-patient contact is invariably brief and a meaningful doctor-patient relationship hardly develops. Media continues to publish incredible stories of malpractice and negligence and is always quick to come to a conclusion demonising the doctors.⁴ This effectively builds up mistrust and in the unfortunate event of any mishap, people jump on to the doctors for immediate revenge. None of the perpetrators ever gets punished.

We call for urgent steps to save the noble profession by providing a better working environment. Strict laws to ensure safety of the medical personnel with stiff penalties for the offenders are the need of the hour along with the political will to implement those provisions. Every single punishment would force the next offender to think twice before assaulting on-duty medical personnel.

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