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Technology And Medicine

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One is stuck at the amazing strides in technology as applied to medicine these days. When I had just finished school and was about to join college my seniors said if you learn zoology it is the stepping-stone for a career in medicine. However I was fascinated with chemistry, physics and maths. Later in medical college I soon realized knowledge in chemistry and physics was worthwhile. Zoology was not relevant. Much later while training in cardiology it was that the advantage of learning mathematics really helped. Calculations of cardiac output, valve areas, resistance, impedance and a host of other measurements were made easy. Principles of fluid-filled catheters or ultrasound transducers were understood better without any struggle. Of late we deal in strain, strain rate, fractional flow reserve and other advances.

Simultaneously the advent of computers revolutionized medicine as in no other field. While students of my generation burnt the midnight oil analyzing hemodynamic data using natural calculators stored in our cortex, the present generation can get all the data by the click of a mouse. We learned medicine at the bedside and in lecture rooms where teachers gave eloquent speeches with just a blackboard and some pieces of white chalk. There was a lecturer in pathology who used to ask at 7 in the morning to a packed full house - "What topic you want to hear today?" And we will listen spell-bound for an hour in the most elegant language to the most intricate details of various diseases. As post-graduates it was sheer magic to listen to the mature physician going into the minute points of clinical history elicited patiently over a good 40 minutes coming with the correct diagnosis without even touching the patient in some cases. And there was a professor who could keep you engrossed in clinical examination from morning till night without even worrying about food in between. These all happened before technology hijacked clinical medicine.

Compare that to the dark room where slides will come one after the other at a pace beyond the comprehension of even the quickest mind. Half the people will be sleeping-some even snore! Videos will roll out, slides will fly in, animators have a field time and finally audience will be woken from their sleep when they hear clapping. This is modern teaching. One cannot help being nostalgic.

Where did we lose the romance of medicine? No one wants to listen to a patient's history. Either there is no time or many will consider it not cost-effective. Who wants to look at jugular pulsations or listen to a late systolic murmur or S4? The knowledge derived from the scans or other images has sidelined the graphic picture you could have gathered by a more systematic logical acquisition of data. Machines and computers have taken over medicine in a big way and the younger generation

may be left behind if there is no proficiency in them. While some of our teachers travelled by ship to alien shores and struggled to acquire foreign degrees now even that can be got if you use laptops or iPads intelligently.

In an ever-increasing pace of life in every field is there any place for human values like love, compassion, patience, understanding, gratitude, honesty, justice and similar feelings? I wish these values also would guide one's progress while pursuing material milestones.