

Learning ethics through cinema

“Patch Adams”

The film “Patch Adams” which was directed by Tom Shadyac is based on the life of Hunter Patch Adams, who after spending time in a mental hospital, decides to become a physician. This film directly conveys so many ethical issues related to the medical professionalism, from the beginning to the end.

The film begins with Patch entering into the mental hospital. There his roommate is a psychiatric patient. The way he deals with him is different than other formal doctors. The problem with this patient called ‘Rudy’ is, he thinks there are so many squirrels in the room who come to bite him. He screams when this feeling comes to his mind. In this incident, Patch recognizes his problem and he also acts like there are squirrels. So Rudy becomes very friendly with Patch and he realizes there’s no any difference between Patch and him. Therefore, Patch could help him even in going to the bathroom. But in nowadays, not a single doctor tends to act like this. What they try to do is convince him that there are no squirrels, it’s just an imagination of him and lowers his mentality further.

So Patch leaves the mental hospital saying to the director, “I want to help people. Last night with Rudy, I connected to another human being. I want more of that. I want to learn about people, help them with their troubles.” And further he tells, “You don’t even look at people when they are talking. I want to listen. Really listen to people. This statement shows us what a doctor’s vision should be.

After that he enters into a medical school. Speech of the head of that medical school, directly conveys some golden rules in medical ethics.

“First do no harm. Because he trusts you, the way a child trusts. He trusts you to do no harm.”

Patch Adams meets a friend called ‘Truman’. What he says to his friend in another incident, is worthy to the modern society. “What’s the difference between a doctor and a scientist? People. We want to help people. We have to treat the patient as well as the disease. That is why we have dive into people, wade into the sea of humanity.”

Even from the first year of his medical life, Patch starts to visit patients. But the director of the hospital restricts his freedom of visiting patients till third year. In the dialogue between them, Patch says that those people are his friends. But the director’s point of view is patients need doctors; not friends. But the scenes of Adams work in wards very well depict that how his work affects people’s life, both physically and mentally. Patch knows how to deal with different people in different ways. At the very first moment when he visits a pediatric ward, all the children were sleeping. But after his disguise, all the children got up very happily. He knew how to get the attraction of little children. What he used to cope with the pancreatic cancer patient is different.

There is another incident in the movie, a professor showing a patient with diabetic neuropathy. When the professor asked for questions, all other students ask about the

disease. But Patch asks, what the patient's name is and then he speaks with her, just saying "hi!". Because he realized that she was panicked. Not even a single person talked with her or even looked at her. But after hunter's reaction, she becomes comfortable. This incident also shows us that a doctor's duty is to treat the disease as well as the patient.

Patch is very friendly with his colleagues as well as the hospital staff. He shares experiences with nurses. He learns from nurses as well as from patients.

Also Patch shows how humor can affect one's health. He tells that, "laughter increases secretion of catecholamines and endorphins, which in turn increases oxygenation of blood, relaxes arteries, speeds up the heart, decreases blood pressure, which has a positive effect on all cardiovascular system & respiratory elements as well as increasing the immune response. So he acts humorously improving people's health and improving the quality of life.

Also this movie highlights some lapses in medical professionalism. There's a conversation in the canteen. Patch speaks sarcastically about an incident happened in the hospital. There was a mother screaming to see her dying child, but she was not allowed until a form was filled. Another person in the canteen joins this conversation by saying that once she got an appendicitis, as she had forgotten her insurance card, she was sent home, saying that it was the hospital procedure. So from these incidents, they try to convey us that there are some incidents that we have to struggle between the law and humanity. In such cases, as medical professionals, we have to be more humane than stuck into procedures.

There's another aspect showing in this movie. Hunter's lover was murdered by a patient who came to the "Gesundheit institute", which was established according to his concept. It conveys that all human beings are not worthy of trust. So while being with patients medical professionals have to consider their safety also.

So this was a fantastic movie which gave us so many messages.

"A doctor's mission should be not just to prevent death, but also to improve the quality of life. A patient is also a doctor. Because a doctor is a someone who helps someone else."