

Learning ethical aspect of medical practice through cinema

Based on movie 'Patch Adams'

The film 'Patch Adams'(1998) is a semi biographical comedy drama directed by Tom Shadyac.It is based on the true life story of Dr. Hunter Patch Adams and his book 'Gesundheit' –Good health is a laughing matter .It conveys a revolutionary idea of using humor and compassion in treating patients opposed to the traditional methods in medical practice and education at that time. This film therefore is a milestone in the subject of medical ethics which we speak of today.

Medical ethics is the doctor- patient relationship. It includes following 4 principles,

-) AUTONOMY is respecting the right of adult patients to make their own competent choices and decisions.
-) BENEFICIENCY is working for the benefit of patients
-) NON MALEFICENCY-'do no harm'
-) JUSTICE is fairness and equality

On the verge of suicide Patch Adams checks himself into a psychiatric ward. What he sees there changes his life. He interprets the misery of psychiatric patients in a more humanizing, rather in a humorous way. Therefore he decides to be a good doctor to help them. He enrolls himself to the Medical College of Virginia,as the oldest first year student. This shows that the attitude of a doctor should always be the BENEFICIENCY of patients and your age does not matter in that.

At this time the belief of the dean of the college was to' treat the patients as patient, without bonding with them as humans'. The main focus was merely to gather knowledge and maintaining a high status of life as a doctor. The emotions of patients hardly had any value. Almost all the students of the college follow the traditional methods of learning and receives no clinical exposure in the first year. But Patch Adams infringes the rules of the college, speaks with the patients, attempts to help and keep them happy. In the film it says,

“Our job is improving the quality of life not just delaying death”

Meanwhile he manages to do well in his exams. The two medical students Carin and Truman also believe in his ways and the three friends start working together.

The film also emphasizes the importance of development of good communication skills, and working in collaboration with other medical staff, such as nurses and attendants as a quality of professionalism.

To add to the sense of humor in the film at one incident, Patch Adams gets the responsibility of decorations for an obstetrics conference. There he builds a gigantic pair of female legs over the entrance and marks the door as the cervix. There are lot more incidents that make us see the

aspects of medical profession in a stress less creative way. It throws sarcasm at the' big headed behavior 'of doctors.

At some point, when the group of students were visiting the patients with their professor, the students were forcing numerous questions on a patient asking her symptoms. She was totally in a misery. Only Patch Adams considering her emotions asks "What is her name?" This single question makes the patient calm down and she becomes more cooperative. In the film it says,

"You treat a disease, you win ,you lose. You treat a person I'll guarantee you will win.

Patch Adams shows how concern, kindness and determination can succeed in anything, by making contacts with a bad tempered patient with pancreatic cancer.

Meanwhile he builds a free medical clinic with the wealth of Aurther Mendelson,to whom he helped while in the psychiatric ward. It is a place to treat patients in his way of humor and compassion. He treats poor patients without medical insurance. It enlightens JUSTICE in medical practice

In the meantime the relationship of Patch Adams and Carin develops into romance. The work at the clinic becomes their whole life. Once Calin herself makes a home visit to a mentally disturbed patient. This patient kills her and commit suicide. Patch Adams is devastated and guilt ridden by her death. And questions the goodness in humanity. This rises the point of professional security and role of chaperons in medical practice.

Finally he decides to continue his work in honor of Calin. He is expelled from the college for practicing without medical license. But finally he is graduated.

The film patch Adams is all about doctor-patient relationship .It touches the ethical side of medical career with humor and sarcasm.