

A Laughing Doctor

Bunzo Takamatsu

I have a rather unique friend, who is a medical doctor but does not want to practice medicine. He teaches in a college in New Mexico. I cannot forget the story he told me about his doctor friend. This doctor has an extremely busy practice, but my friend thinks he is almost a quack. His diagnosis is not necessarily accurate. His prescriptions are sometimes questionable. He does not use any kind of alternative medicine, yet constantly more patients than he can handle try to see him. His cure rate is far above average. Anyway, the bottom line is that he is very popular. Being curious, my friend decided one day to visit him and find out what was really going on.

After visiting this doctor, my friend understood why. This doctor was a genius at making anyone laugh. Even a patient with the most serious disease cannot help feeling better and eventually laughing when seeing him. 'It was really amazing! I don't know how he does it.' As he said this, my friend seemed quite amused and started to laugh. It seems this doctor had some kind of a laughing aura.

It has been more than ten years since I heard this story. For some reason I remember it often. I came to think that maybe this doctor, far from being a quack, is really a great doctor. The requirements for being a good doctor would be the ability to make an accurate diagnosis and to prescribe proper treatment. I believe that most doctors try to accomplish this. I wonder, though, whether there may be more important and fundamental things to remember as a good doctor. For instance, how to relieve patients from the fear of disease.

I believe one of the biggest faults of modern medicine is not giving patients relief. A good example is any medical book written for lay people. The more you read, the more depressed you get. There is hardly anything there that would make you feel relieved. It usually intensifies your fear. I also hear stories from my patients about doctors who threaten them and make them feel very fearful. (I know it's not fair to mention such stories about doctors, since most patients are not happy with regular doctors anyway.)

Fear is one of the strongest emotions we have, and it creates an intense impression on our mind. If you fear

one thing constantly, chances are that it will become true. This could be another so-called iatrogenic disease. In this sense modern medicine can be called "threatening medicine". Patients get scared and eventually do what they are told. I don't mean to deny modern medicine. There are people who need surgery. Some people's lives are saved by certain drugs. But it is also true that many people don't have any other choice but modern medicine. The fact is that we are told modern medicine is the most superior, and that other forms of medicine are rather heretical, and if you choose alternative medicine you are risking your life. This kind of atmosphere is very suffocating for patients.

Every human being is a little different from another. In addition, if psychological problems are involved, how in the world can we deal with these problems with only one system of medicine? I hope Oriental medicine can make people breath easier. I think it can give relief to people who feel smothered with fear of the diseases they have. At least this should be our first task. Patients may start getting better just by being freed from fear. If they can laugh about their disease, they will already be fifty percent better. I think a person like Norman Cousins is only one of many people who laughed his disease away and was cured of it. The doctor my friend told me about may not be a good technician, but who can deny that he is a good doctor?

Acupuncture which is divorced from techniques may indeed be dressed with the fashionable term science. It may even be so called scientific. But this is acupuncture which has already been rendered lifeless. It may be acupuncture that can be studied, but it will never become the art of acupuncture that gives rise to acupuncture (techniques).

Sorei Yanagiya