

Health-scare System!

By: BM Hedge, Ph. D., 2010 Padma Bhushan awardee – July 24, 2013

Social injustice and illnesses are related. Poverty is the mother of all diseases—from common cold to cancer. A child born to a poor mother will have a very small hippocampus major in the brain, small pancreas, small vessels, and so on, which makes the child vulnerable to killer diseases. In addition, the small hippocampus makes the mind unfit for intellectual pursuits. Poverty is a double-edged sword. It also impoverishes the poor further depriving them of their daily wage earnings. The poor pay with their lives, eventually.

It is not prevention that should be our motto but health promotion. *Disease is failed health promotion. Prevention brings in screening in its wake which promotes disease mongering.* Every human body is built to last as long as it can, thanks to its immune system. The immune system needs boosting, on a regular basis, to keep the person disease-free. Modern medicine is not doing that. Clean water, air and food are of vital importance. Meanwhile, a third of the world population lives on less than one meal a day.

Nutritional immune deficiency syndrome (NIDS) is one of the biggest killers in poorer countries; it is deadlier than AIDS. India has the largest population of children with NIDS—roughly 67 million. This does not lead to social justice. While such a large chunk of our population cannot afford even one meal a day, the rich and the powerful flaunt their wealth. The fact that the government spends millions of rupees on space programmes shows callous disregard for the poor.

Poverty economics has to be learnt not in Oxbridge or Harvard but in the slums of the poor countries. Only then does one get the true picture. Truth is usually the first casualty in world affairs. It is akin to 'Dictator Experiments' of John List, which showed that *mankind is not altruistic*. The controlled experiments of Vernon Smith and Daniel Kahneman showed that mankind is hardwired to be altruistic! While the latter got the Nobel Prize in 2002, the genuine study of John List, which concluded that mankind is indeed greedy, did not.

The medical profession, like all other professions, has become *homo-economicus*. Doctors are not concerned with poverty eradication, lest we should break our own rice bowl! Doctors can never survive without patients while patients could survive without doctors. Disease mongering has become routine in medicine as shown by a special issue of *PLOS Medicine* brought out by the editor, Ray Moynihan. Instead, the medical-care system has become today's '*Medical Scare System*'. We seem to have forgotten the motto—Patient care is CARING for the patient—as enunciated by Sir Francis Peabody way back in 1927.

Hospitals and doctors have very little to do with health of the populace. More doctors and poorer health has been the finding of a 14 industrialised countries' study. (JAMA 2000; 284:

483-485) Civil engineers, politicians, social workers, philanthropists and altruistic social organisations should be able to do something better for public health. Food, shelter and clean water and a hygienic environment, coupled with economic empowerment and ethical education, should do the trick to keep our immune system at its peak.

One gets a glimpse of the hidden agenda of countries that become rich at the expense of the poor in a wonderful book called *Perpetuating Poverty* published by the Cato Institute in Washington DC. Come to think of it, if poverty is truly eradicated, the world order would collapse. Meanwhile, our own efforts to eradicate poverty have not made a difference. Will our policy-makers wake up to this reality, please?