

## EDITORIAL

## Stealing in medicine

Irene Christodoulou

*Editor in Chief*

Stealing is a very common phenomenon in the area of medicine. Of course it is not something new but rather is quite an old problem. Perhaps today it has changed somewhat as far as the methods used, since new technologies have helped change many things. The ethics of medical doctors are considered very important as a reflection of their character. If immorality is a problem for other professions it acquires scandalous proportions in the case of health professionals. People consider that a doctor should always be moral, yet do not appear generally to be interested in the low wages of doctors. According to the beliefs of most critics, the doctor should accept living with low wages to prove his morality but also be able to rent a house, support his family, buy medical books and participate in congresses, as well as be able to keep in touch with modern Medicine through training seminars abroad. Obviously, this is impossible. On the other hand, physicians who ask for money from their patients in public Hospitals are labelled as criminals, and thus they are accused of criminal behaviour even if they receive money and gifts from rich patients. Thus, while stealing committed by doctors is more obvious in society, in actuality it is more commonplace that society consistently and shamelessly steals the essential professional rights of physicians, not only on an economic level, but also on the level of every day human rights.

**WHEN THE DOCTOR STEALS FROM THE PATIENT**

The fee of a doctor includes his work in examining and treating the patient, the determination of diagnosis and therapeutic planning. Often, when healthy persons visit a doctor, they become disappointed when the doctor asks for his fee, assuming that since they are healthy the doctor should not be paid. Thus many doctors in general, become used to prescribing drugs to all of their patients with a view to justifying their fee. It is reasonable therefore to support the view that the basis of polipharmacotherapy is hidden in the patients' beliefs and impressions. The same holds true for patients who wish to be operated on regardless of the opinion of doctors. These patients will continue to visit various doctors, until they find a doctor that will agree to perform the operation on them.

Society awards the "money-maker" profile of famous doctors who are highly appreciated by most people for their high level services. Such a doctor has become a commercial product, just like a pair of expensive and fashionable shoes or a luxurious bag, the talented and famous doctor begins to belong to the domain of the wealthy and elite classes, and becomes the unattainable dream of the poor. Naturally a doctor with such a high

standard of living also has the luxury of travelling abroad for scientific reasons and enriching his knowledge, so the "distance" from a poor doctor grows considerably.

Perhaps therefore illegal money-making (in public Hospitals) or overcharging (in private health services) are parts of a formula that is dictated by society, and doctors are simply following society's lead by developing the dictated profile of success.

**WHEN THE PATIENT STEALS FROM THE DOCTOR**

Many patients do not wish to pay for health services and pretend to be too poor to afford the fee of medical doctors. Young doctors especially accept to offer their services for free, because they believe that their profession is holy, and lead a very restricted life with very little money which results in their economic collapse. Actually, this situation may reflect the greatness of the medical profession and its idealism, since no other professional is as often called to offer volunteer work as that of the doctor.

**WHEN THE STATE STEALS FROM THE DOCTOR**

While the state regards the doctor just as it does all other professionals when it comes to paying taxes and other debts, the same is not true when it comes to doctors being paid for their services to the public. In several countries, with Greece prominent amongst them, public Hospitals pay very low fees for their medical doctors. The most recent example to emerge from Greece is that of the so called "assistant medical doctors", who are specialists that work in rural Hospitals with contracts of one year only, and are paid 1200 Euros per month. More than half of these doctors' annual fees are dedicated to rent and the furnishing of a house, with a new house having to be chosen every year. The assistant doctors' payments are very often not enough for a decent living and many of them are supported by their families or work in two jobs illegally, since the state obliges them to sign a declaration that they will work in a public hospital only and will not work elsewhere until the contract duration expires. The reason that some hundreds of doctors work as assistant doctors is not financial. There is the commitment that they will be preferred when they apply for a job as permanent doctors in public hospitals. In actuality however these persons do not precede in the nominations, because in Greece the appointments of doctors in the public sector is based on meritocratic criteria. Thus, the state has been stealing money and time from hundreds of doctors, that have been living like beggars since 2001, with a view to working permanently in a public Hospital.