

The Fayetteville Observer

Op-Ed: Sid Gautam: Quantum leap in patient care

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By Sid Gautam

An elite institution like Cleveland Clinic has started promoting "same-day appointments available." More than 100,000 foreign patients flock to the clinic for special treatments.

The innovative changes in treating patients are forcing other hospital systems to critically examine the role, responsibilities and age-old operation systems of hospitals. These days, television, radio and newspapers are filled with ads related to the state of health care in America. But all these ads create more controversies and counter ads, rather than unbiased facts and opinions helpful for individuals to make decisions.

Like nuclear proliferation in developing countries, there is an unprecedented arms race going on between hospitals. Many hospital systems in America are facing a crisis of generating enough revenues to support the operation. One out of every four hospitals in America is basically surviving on government reimbursements. Many small systems are reaching out to big ones to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

Hospitals face a daunting task of attracting privately insured patients to their hospitals. In order to attract insured patients, the hospitals, like any other big business, are going on aggressive marketing campaigns and media blitzes. The financially struggling hospitals are competing with other hospitals in acquiring the latest sophisticated gadgets. The high-tech machines provide the bragging rights of having the latest technology to provide cures for deadly diseases.

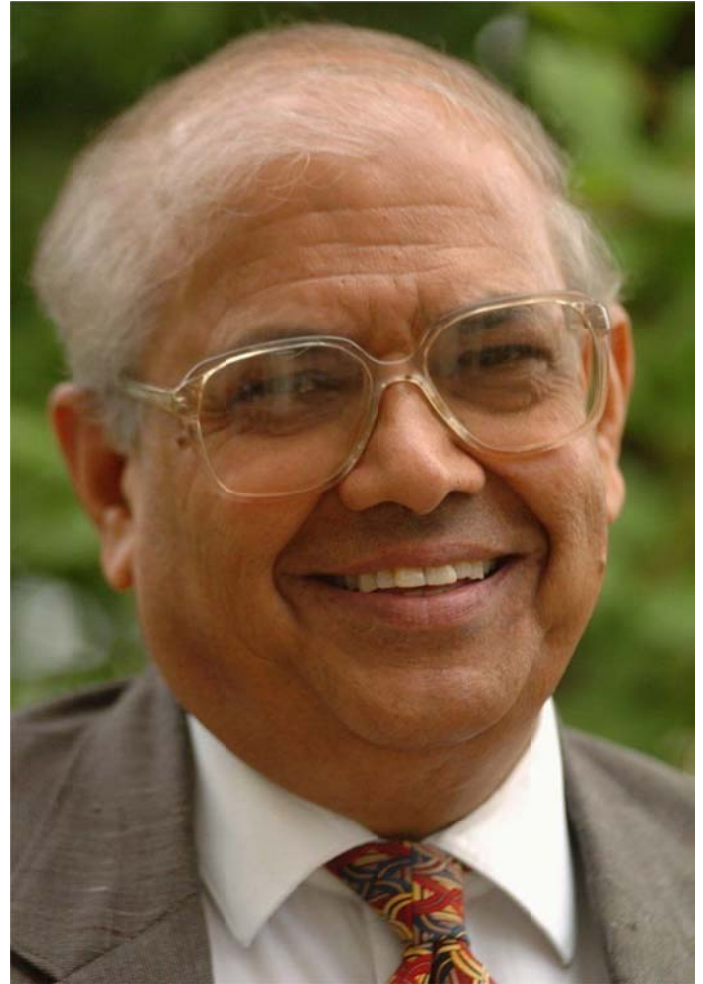
The unintended consequence of this stampede is the greater loss of touch with ailing patients. In a free-enterprise market system, we are conditioned to believe that the higher price of the product entails higher quality and a greater level of satisfaction. But in the field of health care, the constantly rising prices have not yielded significant results, either in reducing incidences of serious illness or increasing the quality of health care in America.

In this high-tech and low-touch environment, patients suffer from the lack of Marcus Welby, M.D. care - the compassion and sincere affectionate treatment so essential for speedy recovery. No wonder patients and their families are unhappy with hospital treatment and services.

Today, we are all aware of the low approval ratings of the president, Congress and politicians in general. Similarly, hospital patient-satisfaction surveys tell a dismal story. The primary cause is hospital culture, where patients are dollar signs in accounting ledgers.

As Dr. Sandeep Jauhar wrote in his bestseller, "Doctored: The Disillusionment of an American Physician," "the culture of medicine is such that doctors can often be aloof with patients and sometimes arrogant. Very often these attributes are a result of the dysfunctional system. It is forcing doctors to behave and practice in ways that most often they don't want to practice."

Observer readers have seen the running commentary on the role and effect of "hospitalists" in our local hospitals.



File photo

The leading hospitals and elite clinics in America are changing this culture. They are moving forward with an innovative approach in patient care. It is called integrative medicine. This approach to medical care brings patients and practitioners into a dynamic partnership dedicated to optimizing the patient's health and healing. It focuses on the whole person, recognizing that the subtle interactions of mind, body, spirit and community have a direct impact on vitality and well-being.

Dr. Adam Perlman, head of Duke Integrative Medicine, will be the speaker of our next Happiness program. There are only 50 academic health centers of Integrative Medicine in America. Dr. Perlman was elected chair for a consortium of 50 leading academic medical centers around the country with integrative medical programs.

This program will be held on Saturday at the Kiwanis Recreation Center. It will start at 9 a.m. To register go to www.stepress.org/events or call 910-433-1568. The program is free and open to the public.

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