

VIEWPOINT[#]

Who am I?

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Several times, I ask myself verifying whether I was born in the wrong country in the wrong century taking a wrong profession. Though I was trained by eminent surgeons like Prof Dr Ba Than and Prof Dr Maung Maung Lay since I was a third year MBBS student, I was not enjoying cutting people but enjoyed cutting the whole community into half instead.

I spent most of my time sick-nursing lonely patients in deserted corners of the wards of hospitals and learnt different and unforgettable lessons from them. They were the people dragging me out of the traditional way of thinking as a treating doctor. With their assistance, I could differentiate sickness and disease. No medicine could cure the sickness of socially aloof. Jose Rezal, Norman Bethun and Ernesto Che Guevarra were my expatriate role models who tried their best to treat the social sicknesses in collaboration with the vast communities.

Working with people in communities makes me fulfilled. Dividing the community members for constructive confrontation, in reality for better plans for tomorrow to be managed, is my pleasure. I maneuvered old and young to show their generation gap and to find solution of root causes of sickness in their community. Paulo Fraire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" influenced me a lot. His problem posing approach for social change is my favorite tool and I believe that most of the Behavior Change Theories could be transformed into actions by using this as a complement.

After standing tall with my own style, I found myself aloof from the medical community like my sick patients. "Preventive and Social Medicine", the most favorite subject during my undergrad days, guided me when I think about health promotion which is totally different from medicine and nothing to do with medicine. Building a society for "Gross National Happiness" is far away from building hospitals.

To have control over their own health determinants in the society is a tough challenge demanding social justice and equity. That equity business, I learnt from an old leader of a remote community, is what we all should be striving hard to achieve it. While I was beating the bush by saying niceties in one of my Four Cleans Workshop, one old guy challenged me by retorting that "You drink, I drink and both of us pee. There is no difference between you - doctor and me - farmer".

That was a tough lesson I learnt. Attitude on public health was entirely based on that concept. There is no "I know better than you" business in public health. In many fields, we doctors are naïve. Most of the time, we are part of the problem. Solving problems need people having capability and capacity to learn more. Now, I spent half of my life with those commoners in solving many health problems but going nowhere in reforming the system without adjustment with human face. However, I gathered millions of friends with abject poverty and uncountable powerful enemies at the same time.

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