

Of medicine, metaphors, and war

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RHiME Cover, 2024

Filling the Void

Artist: Dr Nonita Gangwani
Former Senior Resident, Department of
Physiology
University College of Medical Sciences,
Delhi

About the artist:

Dr Gangwani is a medical doctor with multiple sclerosis; and an artist who paints using a head mouse with her laptop. This image too has been created with a head mouse.

A world at war with itself...
Why is humankind unkind?

Willingly
greedily
selfishly
without honor
or respect
it steals

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burns
degrades
uses
abuses
misuses
hoards
resources meant for all

People at war with people
produce only
pain
distress
depression
panic
stress
refugees
loss
hunger
poverty
malnutrition
injury
disability
murder
death
sexual violence
struggle
marginalisation

In the practice of medicine
every global health crisis
resurrects metaphors of war

“battling COVID”
“fighting an invisible enemy”
“a war on misinformation”
“coordinated attack”
“frontline warriors”

Medicine and War...
connected through metaphors
disconnected in every other way

The practice of medicine
is NEVER like the operation of war

Medicine is NEVER war
however connected
it may be to
urgency
aggression
criticality
emergency
strategy
intensiveness

Medicine is compassion
War is hate
One mends
the other rends

Medicine heals
minds and bodies
it is preventative
collaborative
humble
ethical
empowering
War is none of these

When the two come together
and they invariably do
War stoops abysmally low
Medicine rises to the impossible task

Medicine rises
despite cruel blockades
and shortages of infra
of personnel, drugs
of scalpels, sutures
It rises
despite an abundance
of danger, of smoke
of fire, chemicals, death
Medicine makes the impossible possible

There are kinder,
more positive,
more humane
metaphors than war
“addressing COVID”
“navigating an invisible challenge”
“countering misinformation”
“collaborative response”
“dedicated professionals”

Words matter
Actions matter more

When people are at war
with themselves
and the world is caught
off-guard
the healthcare professional steps in
and gallantly fills the void.

This editorial is dedicated to all people who make it their life's work to fill the void, but especially to healthcare workers.