

## Small Size, Big Joy – A Pediatrician’s Life!

For non-pediatricians, Pediatrics appears to be a rather challenging – if not demanding – branch of medical practice. I remember the days when we used to have Grand Rounds of the wards during which the entire medical faculty of our college would descend on the pediatric wing to check out our little patients. Those were days when echocardiography was still not in vogue (the year was 1981) and soon, the senior cardiologists would be at their wits end, wondering how on earth one asks a two-year-old child to hold his breath and let them auscultate the murmur to their usual satisfaction. How the hell can you examine such children? – a senior professor fumed, just as the uncooperative toddler yanked his glasses right off his face! We of course grinned in amusement and told him that we manage to do the needful between the breaths and the cries.

Of course, pediatricians love the job and the perks that come with it – being in contact with young children (and young parents!) for the entire length of their careers – even when they grow old, probably being the most rewarding of them all. The pediatric clientele is like none other – we know that children can be brutally frank and outrageously funny. But they are also the most loyal patients – if they may indeed be called so. What better sight than having one of them proudly enter with their own child now for vaccination to the doctor under whose care they blossomed into adults – the joy is truly unmatched for both.

Practising in Allahabad with a mix of urban and rural patients can have its funny moments. Several years back a family from a remote village brought their child for treatment. “*Kya umar hai bacche ki?*” (what is the age of your child?), I asked. “*Ab apay samajh lein sahib, humka nahin pata*” (You interpret yourself, I don’t know), he replied. Without saying anything, I asked him to make his child stand on the weighing machine upon which he looked at his wife in amazement and said “*Kaisi kaisi machine aay gayi hai aaj kal – kitni umar nikli sahib?*” (What machines have been invented these days – so what is the age of my child according to the machine, sir?). On another occasion, I was surprised to hear a howl of protest from a young girl while my assistant was explaining the prescription to her. She kept on repeating “*Hum itni badi capsule nahin kha sakte*” (I can’t swallow

such a large capsule) but in front of her there was just the prescription. Perplexed, we asked her which capsule she was talking about and she pointed to the paperweight on top of the prescription which was in the shape of a capsule!

I have an aquarium in my chamber – it acts as a great pacifier for crying children. In fact the family physician who used to treat me when I was a child had one in his chamber and I remember how much I would enjoy looking at the colorful fish swimming around, while waiting to be examined. It has a soothing effect on a child who might otherwise be apprehensive when entering the doctor’s chamber and many of my regular children make a beeline straight to the aquarium, exchanging notes on the wellbeing of its occupants with my assistant. The more meticulous ones (the one’s destined to become IIT graduates later on in life, I suppose) even keep a tab on the numbers – “there were nine of them last time but now there are only seven – what happened to the other two?” they ask. But aquarium watching can have its funny moments too as I discovered once when a small child of about three years stood in front of the aquarium, hands in his pockets watching the fish swim, apparently transfixed and mesmerized by the sight. Or so we thought till he turned around and announced to his mother in Bengali “*Aami khabo!*” (I want to eat them)!

Over a period of time, pediatricians get used to all kinds of children in their office – the cranky, crying, cheerful, hyperactive and serious, and love them all. Probably, the pediatrician’s brain finds a way of dealing with unwelcome noise and activity by simply blocking them off at the thalamic level, but the one small child who really scares the pediatrician is the silent child. A child crying lustily is such a comfort (right from birth) but a silent, sick child who does not cry sets the alarm bells ringing like none other for all pediatricians – much like Sherlock Holme’s legendary dog that did not bark!.

*Funding:* Wealth of goodwill generated from over three decades of practice.

*Competing interests:* None stated.

**ANIL SHUKLA**

*Arogya Niketan,*

*347/8, Lukerganj, GT Road, Allahabad, India, 211001*

*shukla2006@gmail.com*