

Being a doctor: time for a reality check

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Dr. Wang and colleagues' survey results on job satisfaction of doctors in China and its follow-up study on attractiveness on medicine career in China has provided an insight that for many doctors, having a job that is truly satisfying—the kind where work doesn't feel like work anymore is pure fantasy (1-3). Ultimately the heart of job satisfaction is in your attitude and expectations. It's more about how you approach your job rather than the actual duties performed. Career dreams are one thing; practical reality is often another.

Much like priesthood, medicine can be thought of as a “calling”. To a certain extent this is certainly true for you must have a great desire to be a doctor. There must be a driving passion to help people, a desire to be challenged and a need to learn throughout your life. Time and energy will be sacrificed in order to care for your patients, often forsaking your loved ones and yourself. Job satisfaction doesn't have to mean pursuing the ultra-glamorous or making money from your job. Sometimes job satisfaction can be found in the most unexpected places... Most doctors will tell you that it is simply an inner desire within them to help others.

Once you have decided to become a doctor you must pursue it whole-heartedly. It takes years of study and hard work to become a doctor and even after that you will be facing many challenges. Probably the most challenging part of being a doctor is working in a busy and time pressured environment. However, for those doctors who are only interested in the money they should probably look for another field because even if they do get past medical school, residency will wash them out.

In Malaysia despite the long working hours in the medical profession, applications to medical schools are still on the rise. One reason could be that medicine is still among the highest paying and most prestigious professions

in the country. As a doctor you will not only enjoy the monetary rewards but the humanistic rewards as well. Telling a family that their loved one just died can be very painful but helping an injured man walk again, thereby giving him the gift of dignity is priceless.

Medical schools and residency programs might be able to help out by enlightening students and trainees about the challenges of being a doctor and preparing them for realities of being a doctor. Media has shaped much of the perception of being a doctor. TV shows and movies have always portrayed that medicine is the only profession with the power and duty to save lives. Maybe because if work as a real life doctor was shown, it would make a dull episode or movie.

Doctors are not perfect yet often too much is expected from them. Being a physician has always been a stressful occupation; after all, doctors hold people's lives in their hands. In the wake of many lawsuits aimed at doctors, malpractice insurance has skyrocketed. Many good doctors have left citing rising malpractice costs. For in what other profession can a simple mistake cost a life?

Depending on the level of development of the country, problems stem from different issues which are beyond the control of doctors: geopolitical events, economic and social problems, and even natural disasters. Sometimes it is the total lack of healthcare infrastructure, government corruption or wars that make “serving humanity” impossible. For some underpaid government doctors when it gets to a point where they feel unappreciated and have to argue about being paid, it takes away the passion for what they do.

Based on the study by Dr. Wang and colleagues it is comforting to know that medicine is still an attractive profession in China. While there's no doubt that doctors face many challenges, many also continue to love what they

do, and find that helping others is still rewarding despite the long hours and being underpaid. The key to future doctors is to manage his or her expectations and acknowledge the challenges.

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