

My daughter is a doctor... and that is my dilemma

Ninan P. George

I seldom dream; but whenever I dream, it invariably ends on a sad note. The other day I had a dream. By fate or luck my daughter joined what every parent in India or perhaps elsewhere in the world dreams of – a medical college! I don't know whether she got admission on merit or by greasing the palms of the bigwigs of the institute.

I proudly watch my daughter emerging as a fully qualified doctor. With her stethoscope around her neck (like every medical student sporting right from the first year), white apron hanging loosely on her shoulders and newly acquired goggles, which cover half her face (all brought from Dubai, of course), she faithfully reflects the image of a modern doctor!

It is dinner time. As usual, my daughter sits beside me. I gulp down a pint of water after my sumptuous dinner when she abruptly catches my hand. "No daddy, no." I stare at her and ask her why. "Extra quantities of water will dilute the hydrochloric acid secreted by the stomach and the food will not be digested properly," she replies. I try to argue with her but I have to give in. After dinner, I go for my usual brand of cigarettes. "Don't you know,

daddy, every cigarette you smoke reduces your life by 15 minutes,” she asks in the tone of a grandmother. I don’t know how she arrived at the 15 minutes per cigarette figure.

“You know your grandfather died at the age of 90 and he was a chain smoker.” I try to reason with her. “That was in the olden days,” she says. “Cigarette smoking is responsible for lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and coronary artery disease,” she continues like a newly appointed college lecturer. I get bored with her and rush to my bedroom.

Ever since I retired from my service, I have been a late riser, enjoying the morning nap like a newborn baby (the pleasure of sleeping early morning is something special, ask any one). Someone touches my head gently and tries to wake me up. I try to ignore and turn the other way. I am pulled out of the bed and I open my eyes reluctantly. It is my doctor-daughter again smiling like a newly appointed salesgirl. “What do you want,” I ask her angrily for disturbing my morning sleep. “Come on daddy, you’re already overweight and this is the time for some rigid exercise,” she says.

“I am 65 and am fit as a ten-dan karate master,” I say flexing my muscle. “Nothing doing. You have to join me for the morning

jog and exercise. Or else, your potbelly will come out further.” I reluctantly join her, wondering whether I did the right thing by sending her for medical studies. While running she explains, “Hypertension and strokes are more common in obese people.” I show very little interest in her blah blah lecture but after watching my indifference, she continues with more enthusiasm. “Coronary artery disease and diabetes mellitus are five times more common in obese people.” I show my irritation and anger by putting a heavy foot but it seems she takes more energy from my frustration and continues. “Increasing extra weight in men is associated with an increased risk of the cancer of the colon, rectum and prostate. Osteoarthritis may be aggravated by obesity.”

“So what the hell do I have to do,” I ask panting like a dog.

“Ho, don’t get angry, daddy. It will increase your adrenaline secretion which in turn will increase your blood pressure,” she calmly replies “Either you have to take daily exercise or reduce your intake of calories.”

By the time we return home after the marathon jog, I am panting like a mad dog. Even my pet dog barks at me thinking I am a stranger! My wife emerges from the house and scolds her seeing my pathetic condition. It is already breakfast time. I rush

to my bathroom for my shower when my daughter stops me. “You are perspiring heavily. Let your body cool down or you will catch cold.” It is breakfast time and I wanted to play safe and try to be seated away from my daughter. But she reads my mind and manages to sit beside me. ‘Idli’ my favourite south-Indian dish, steamed banana and two duck eggs arrive. I try to swallow the egg as if I have not seen food for months! My daughter quickly retrieves the egg from my mouth and says I should not take eggs any more especially duck eggs. I menacingly stare at her and demand to know why. She tries to explain like a KG teacher with a spoon, taking the shape of a stick, in hand. “Egg is a major source of cholesterol. The yolk carries 10 times more cholesterol than the red meat! A high blood cholesterol level increases the risk of developing atherosclerosis.”

“What on earth is this”? I ask, unable to repeat the jargon.

“Atherosclerosis means the accumulation of fatty deposit on the inner lining of the arteries and this increases the risk of coronary artery disease and stroke,” she explains with more vigour.

Being deprived of my morning nap and the thought of skipping my breakfast makes me wonder if I would have to survive only on a loaf of bread and plain water in the days to come! I

become angry and hit the table very hard, cursing the moments I ignored my wife's advice and decided to send my daughter for medical studies.

My little one-year-old toddler, who sleeps beside me, starts crying as if she is participating in an international crying competition.

My wife wakes up and yells at me. "I have been saying that you should go and consult a psychiatrist. Nowadays you talk in your sleep and hit my poor baby quite often." She bursts into tears in the middle of the night for no apparent reason.

I try to explain that I have had a bad dream. "Didn't I tell you that you should say your prayers before you sleep,?" she says to show off her religious upbringing. "Let it be morning, I will call my brother and ask him to take you to a good psychiatrist," she continues.

"I don't need to see a psychiatrist," I mutter. "I should have asked my doctor daughter if there was any medicine for bad dreaming."

My wife switches off the light and tries to pacify my future doctor. I turn the other way and try to sleep wondering what is going to attack me next- is it cholesterol, obesity, cancer or coronary heart disease or something else?

(The writer's e-mail is ninanpg@gmail.com)