

Government hospitals mistreat patients and do not provide them the care they deserve. Patients in such hospitals cry out for help but there's no one to listen to them. **Bazgha Iqbal** reports on some of the problems of patients seeking treatment in public hospitals

Pakistani hospitals are usually divided into two groups: government-owned hospitals and private hospitals. It is common knowledge that where the former are run down, dilapidated and ignored, the latter are well-managed, clean and up-to-date.

But the downside, of course, is that private hospitals are very exclusive and cater only to the very rich, whereas government hospitals are for the poor masses who have to bear with all kinds of maltreatment and unhygienic conditions because they do not have money or power.

Patients and their relatives have many problems in government hospitals — ranging from improper medical treatment to nostrums, unavailability of beds and much more. There are many unheard voices in these hospitals which are suppressed and never given a chance to speak out.

The treatment meted out to patients and their relatives in government hospitals, is deplorable. Doctors and

poor patients who have no choice but to visit them and who are usually illiterate and unkempt, through no fault of their own.

Aside from doctors and their coterie who maltreat patients, medicines are also a grave problem. There are two options for people seeking medical treatment in government hospitals: either buy fake medicine or buy good-quality medicine at inflated prices. Caught between the devil and the deep sea, most people opt for the latter and as for those who do not, they generally die or become even more ill — thanks to the fake opiates they take in. Long queues for obtaining medicines is also a related problem, as is the price of even the nostrums, which, though fake, are very expensive.

Government hospitals all over Pakistan seem to have the same problems: they are generally dirty and unhygienic; lack properly trained staff and machinery; and are usually out of space and equipment.

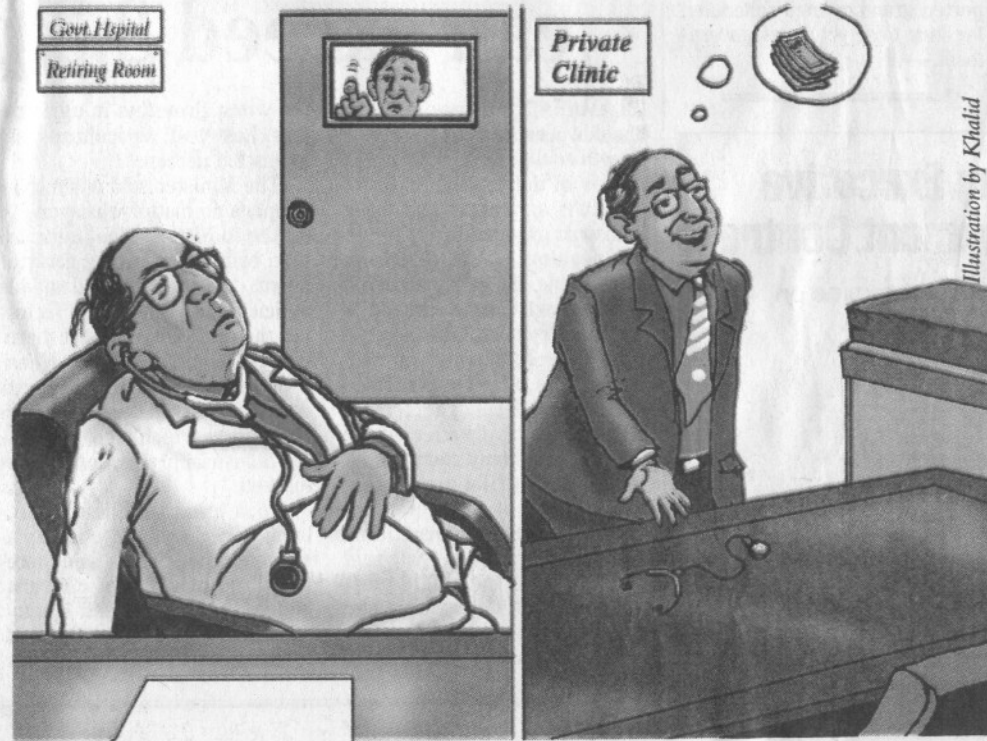
Most hospitals do not even have beds and patients, sometimes, lie on floors or mattresses. Relatives can be seen lying down in corridors on makeshift beds, with pots and pans of food from their homes. "Hospital authorities maltreat us and do not let us meet our relatives in the ward", laments a woman sitting in the corridor of a known hospital in Lahore. Of course, the fact that there is no need for one patient to have twenty relatives with him, does not cross the minds of these people but to mistreat them when they are already suffering so much, seems more than a little unfair.

Maternity wards are,

common people (government hospices also have special wards for the rich), there are many women in one room and though some wards are kept relatively clean, most hospitals do not bother to make these wards very hygienic. A female sweeper does the rounds once in a while but all kinds of dirt and filth remains on the floors

finally discovered that the doctor had left his surgical glove in her stomach during the operation and this glove had caused so much havoc to her insides that there were huge ulcers in her stomach and intestines. She is now fighting a losing battle and is on her deathbed, all because of one doctor's carelessness.

are put to practice. There should be an overhauling of the entire bureaucracy manning all the hospitals' administration which consists of powerful doctors and professors of medical colleges, who have thriving private medical practices on the side and who are least interested in seeing the government



and by the bedside.

Unsanitary conditions and rudeness to patients might be tolerable for many people but there is just no excuse for incompetence by doctors and nurses. It has become common practice on the part of the doctors to make follies such as leaving medical tools in the stomach of the patient, cutting too deep during an operation

Other similar incidents are becoming commonplace and this is unfortunate. It is spoiling the image of those very few doctors who still have some humanity and sensibility left in them. Carelessness and indifference on a doctor's part despoils the name of the hospital as well as the medical profession, which once used to be spotless and scandal-free.

Patients in government

hospitals flourish.

Another common problem, that of medications, can also be controlled if serious action is taken against those who make these fake drugs. Carelessness of doctors can also be brought under some semblance of control if just action is taken against those who have shown incompetence or those who put others' lives in danger.

nurses, most complain, are indifferent at best and hardly have time to even care about how the patient is faring out. This is one of the most common complaints of people, who have had the misfortune of going to the government hospices. Doctors are generally underpaid and impatient and all thoughts of doing service to mankind goes out of their head once they enter the practical field of medicine which in reality is just nagging patients, overtime, meager salary and little or no respect. Thus, they take their anger out on the

ironically, perhaps one of the most unhygienic and unhealthy places in any government hospital. Women lie on beds ridden with all kinds of insects and give birth amongst very dirty surroundings. Shamim, who gave birth to her third child in a well-established hospital on Jail Road, Lahore, remembers having two problems during labour: the incessant pains which are inevitable and the non-stop scratching as a result of the insects that were residing in her bed.

In maternity wards for the

thus losing too much blood, overdosing on anesthesia, messing up the stitches of a wound and making other similar mistakes which usually result in untimely deaths.

A woman, who is now lying unconscious in a prominent hospital, has almost lost her life because of a doctor's incompetence. She had a routine appendix operation from which she never fully recovered. After the operation, she started vomiting and this nausea went on for one year, despite various checkups and innumerable medicines. It was

PATIENTS IN GOVERNMENT hospitals have to face a lot of hardship and though it may be a bitter pill to swallow, the only reason why they have to do so is because they are poor and have no one listening to them. They are victims of heedless doctors, uninterested nurses and fake medicines. Even a healthy person would be sick if he ever visits a government hospital in Pakistan so one can only imagine what the already ill have to go through.

There are, of course, some solutions which come to mind and which can be useful if they

in danger. If even one of these problems is faced head-on, poor and underprivileged patients will have less suffering and a more comfortable stay in government hospitals. Of course, it is in the interest of the powerful doctors and administration people that such changes are never brought on as their own practices would die out but for the sake of the masses, if someone gets up and does something, the medical profession's threadbare reputation might be saved.