

Panel of doctors to work on anti-kickback law

Medical practitioners emphasise need to weed out unethical practice

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The debate on the extremely prevalent 'cut practice' in the medical fraternity has taken a serious turn, with a set of senior doctors working towards a framework to form a legislation to curb it.

The cut refers to the commission offered by one doctor to another after referring a patient for check-ups, diagnostic tests or surgical procedures.

On Wednesday, several doctors got together at the Asian Heart Hospital (AHI) in Bandra Kurla Complex to discuss the need to put an end to such kickbacks, which have tarnished the image of medical professionals to a large extent.

The debate was triggered a fortnight ago after the Asian Heart Hospital put up a hoarding near the airport saying: "Honest Opinion. No Commission to Doctor."


The Indian Medical Association (IMA) wrote to the AHI, asking it to pull down the hoarding as it suggested that other doctors are involved in the unethical practice.

"We had not expected the Indian Medical Association to react in this way. In fact, we have gone ahead and put up 10 more hoardings in the city instead of pulling that one down," said Dr. Ramakant Panda, managing director of AHI.

"We want more and more doctors to be aware about this issue," he said.

Dr. Panda said the IMA has not pulled up a single doctor for the unethical practice in all these years. "They are protecting these kind of activities instead of rooting them out," he said.

Dr Panda said the government has formed an eight-member committee to discuss this unethical practice. "We are studying the anti-

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DR. RAMAKANT PANDA
Managing director, Asian Heart Hospital

kickback laws in countries like the United States, where doctors are penalised if found involved in such practices," he said, terming such legislation the need of the hour.

The committee is chaired by former Maharashtra Director General of Police Pravin Dixit.

Mahad-based medical practitioner Dr. H.S. Bawas-

kar, who filed a complaint with the Maharashtra Medical Council after he received a cheque of ₹1,200 "for professional services" from N.M. Medical Centre in the Sancheti Hospital, Pune, for referring a patient for a CT scan, said stopping commissions is necessary.

"It will reduce necessary investigations. We may not get 100% success, but at least we will get 80% success in curtailing this," he said.

Cardiac surgeon Dr. Devi Shetty said that medicine is an honourable profession. "Unfortunately, a few hospitals are indulging in the unethical practice of accepting or offering kickbacks for patient referrals. This is a very sad development. The practice should be resisted by all medical professionals," said Dr. Shetty.

He said every hospital, big and small, and every practising doctor should refrain from encouraging in-

centive-based practices and restore the integrity of the profession.

"Today, when a new surgeon sets up a facility, he has to give huge cuts to a general physician to get patients referred to him. This is the reality across all specialities," said Dr. Panda.

The cost of medical education is so high that as soon as the doctor sets up his practice, earning becomes important. "And to survive, he can't escape the cut practice," he said.

IMA president Dr. K.K. Agarwal said that any corporate hospital discontinuing its marketing department is a good step.

"The practice of giving commissions is largely carried out by the marketing departments of corporate hospitals. With AHI's campaign, I am assuming that they have decided to discontinue their marketing department," said Dr. Agarwal.