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[Film Review] Medical Students as Guinea Pigs

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4. *Conflict of interest*: What is the interest of the various stakeholders involved in deciding the types of public health measures to be introduced? This is particularly important when the model is competing with another one which has the same intention.
5. *Policy and guidelines as coercive documents in practice*: If a guideline generated by the government of India loses its guiding nature and becomes a mandatory 'clinical order' then it is certainly a violation of the principle of formal justice of applying it as per the patient's need.

In essence, the book is a rich source of theoretical perspectives

and practical examples, taking the readers back into the history of medical science and the political and cultural context of problems of public health in India. The perspective and lessons of the book are essential if our society is to avoid the pitfalls in the future course of medical technology and public health.

One may have expected more guidelines, solutions and preventive steps for health practitioners, to tackle the ethical dilemmas they face in medical practice. However, the authors have done an important job in emphasising the complexities and dilemmas of decision making in such situations, and this point is made in the title itself.

Film review: Medical students as guinea pigs

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404 Error not found. Producers: Nameeta Nair, Kapil Mattoo, 2011. Director: Prawaal Raman. Hindi, 114 minutes.

Developing countries like India and Sri Lanka are trying to tackle the problem of "ragging", the practice, in educational institutions, of senior students bullying new students. The problem is more noticeable in medical colleges in India where it has assumed serious dimensions with psychological, physical and sexual harassment. *404 Error not found* is a film that tries to offer an insight into this menace and its impact on its victims. There is a sub-plot regarding a psychiatry teacher with bipolar disorder who attempts to use one of his students as a guinea pig for its cure. The reference to paranormal phenomena adds another dimension. One key issue viewers, especially medical professionals or students, cannot afford to miss is the discussion of ethics.

The male protagonist, Abhimanyu (Rajvvir Arora), is a bright new medical student who daringly volunteers to stay in Room 404, the infamous 'haunted room' of the college hostel. His self confidence and determination seem admirable and his teacher, Professor Aniruddh (Nishikant Kamath), is impressed with Abhimanyu's efforts to promote rational science among his fellow students. Meanwhile, Abhimanyu has to face the wrath of his seniors for defying their bullying, and starts to lose his mental composure. He begins to "see" the spirit of Gaurav, an earlier occupant of Room 404 who had committed suicide in that very room. Professor Aniruddh, who, incidentally, himself suffers from bipolar disorder, decides to use Abhimanyu as his guinea pig to prove to the world that there is no such thing as paranormal activity. He involves Chris (Imaad Shah), a senior student of the college in his sinister plans. As Abhimanyu's

teachers, including the lecturer wife of Professor Aniruddh himself – Dr Mira (Tisca Chopra) – and Professor Vaidya (Satish Kaushik), try their best to restore his sanity, the hapless student gets ever more deeply involved in the clash between illusion and reality. The egotism of Professor Aniruddh, coupled with his desire to rationalise paranormal activity, ultimately drives Abhimanyu to the point of no return.

The movie raises several key ethical issues in medical practice. Professor Aniruddh fails to respect the autonomy of Abhimanyu, the individual, and his ability to make decisions with regard to his own health and future. He acts in total disregard of the principle of beneficence, as well as the prohibition on maleficence, both key principles of medical ethics. Abhimanyu does not give his voluntary consent to being the study subject for the experiment. As far as biomedical research is considered, the professor does possess professional competence to conduct such an experiment but he is not able to justify how he minimised the risks involved for the subject. He tries to rationalise his actions by saying that he was acting to maximise public interest, but is unable to establish transparency and total responsibility.

Although the film tries to deal with too many issues in a short span of time, it is realistic in its portrayals. Powerful performances by the actors force viewers to empathise with both victim and perpetrator, at one point or the other. Long after its unexpected climax, one continues to think about the issues raised by the film. It manages to highlight abhorrent practices such as ragging and unethical human experimentation in the field of medicine.