



A MAN OF MEDICINE

by Purva Grover

Dr. Gagan Gautam, who is the strength of many cancer patients, confesses that his real strength lies in his ethical and honest approach to his profession as a surgeon.

Taking care of the sick is a tough job; anyone who has ever attended to an ailing parent, sibling or friend would tell you that. For, it requires you to be strong, loving and attentive. Now it would go without saying that taking care of the sick 24 x 7 is just tougher, especially when you are the man everyone is looking to in setting things right. When we first met up with Dr. Gagan Gautam, Head of Urological Cancer Surgery and Robotic Surgery, Medanta, the Medicity, Gurgaon, we thought that he'd speak to us about these tough situations and more. But, we were in for a surprise, a pleasant and healthy one at that.

"Just the satisfaction of having done a good job – a good surgery in my case brings positivity to my life. The feeling that I used my training and skills to improve someone's health is my biggest wellness gift to myself," he says, "A smile and a simple 'thank you' from someone who trusted me with the life of a near and dear one is of course the healthy bonus."

Gautam has performed over 500 robotic operations for prostate, kidney and urinary bladder cancer till date. He feels that the right choice of profession is the way to wellness, "As I see it, one can't achieve wellness without a sense of purpose in life. Medicine, or for that matter any profession, provides just that. One has to feel that one is making a difference to something, someone..." And Gautam makes that difference by not just treating his patients but also by focusing on providing advanced surgical care to urological cancer patients in India. He has worked both in India and the United States.

And while he nurses his patients, he confesses that there are moments when he is caught in 'not so healthy' situations. "As a surgeon, it is not always possible to follow a 9 to 5 professional schedule. There are occasions when you have to wake up at 2 a.m. and do a high-speed drive to the hospital. I am sure that is not the healthiest thing to do, both physically and psychologically." And in these hard times does he feel a little weak? "After being on my feet for 36 hours nonstop or skipping two meals in a row as a surgery resident in training, yes. Sometimes things may not always go as planned in spite of the best of your efforts for there are so many factors at play. You may do a great robotic cancer surgery, but the patient may get a lung infection and get very sick; these things can get one down. But all that's forgotten very soon. I am very happy doing what I do and this is the only thing I could have done. Cancer surgery entails a lot of academic and physical hard work but it is well worth it in the end. It provides an unbeatable sense of achievement and satisfaction, but then you have to be made for it."

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And as far as staying fit in these circumstances is concerned, he says it all depends on an individual and his family. "I believe that if you have self-belief and a good moral canvas, you can achieve wellness in all circumstances," he says, adding, "A supportive and understanding family environment is essential for any



professional — doctor or not. Even after a tough day at work, there are always things that you can do with your family. Wellness is not about quantity but quality. A single hour spent with your spouse in the gym may be worth more than three spent lounging around in front of the TV with a bag of potato chips.” We can’t help but agree.

Further, he exclaims with pride that he is happy to be in a profession that is honourable and noble. “Most people would give a lot of respect to a doctor but his/her personal and professional conduct should be deserving of that. It also entails a lot of responsibility on the part of the doctor. When I look around at my peers, I am confident that most of them are competent and conscious of their work ethics,” he says.

And what about the moral side of being a doctor? “Earning money is a byproduct of this profession, not its primary objective. If you are becoming a surgeon (or any type of doctor) primarily to become rich, think again. There are far easier, perfectly legal ways to earn a ton of money. The moral structure of the profession gets disrupted when some of us do not ascribe to this philosophy,” he explains.

Before he heads back to his patients he leaves us with his definition and path to achieving nirvana. “I keep telling myself that this is the best time of my life and that I have to make the most of it. Physical well-being is essential, and regular exercise keeps me physically and mentally conditioned (I am training for my fifth half marathon) but above all I think it is the fact that I am true to my profession that brings peace to me. An ethical, honest and sensitive approach to the patients that I operate on is the least I can do to fulfill my responsibility towards others and my own happiness,” he signs off. Now that’s something we all need to learn and follow from him.



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