

2021 M3 Conference
Q&A with Beryl D'Souza-Vali, MRCPCH
“Mountain Go Throw Yourself into the Sea”

CLICK LINK TO WATCH SESSION: <https://youtu.be/TFHEIQDSw9k>

For a doctor wanting to help prevent and address the most prevalent social injustices in India, what area of medicine is most helpful? What are the biggest needs in the medical field in India? Is it more manpower or finances or something else?

In India, I think anything that is a broader specialty is most helpful if you want to work in community medicine, such as general practice, pediatrics, or ob-gyn. These specialties will make you more available and accessible to the people in the communities. Surgical specialties also have great demand, but then you're confined to working within a hospital. I wouldn't worry so much about the specialty as much as the interest you have to serve. I don't think God will make you give up your desire and dreams to serve; He can use both a broader or more defined medical specialty.

How do you not get weighed down by what you encounter daily?

I think it's God's Spirit that encourages us, and then the church and community of believers who support us. You can get completely absorbed by all the things that are going wrong or just hearing one sad story after another story. In scripture, as we see God revealing Himself and revealing Himself through problems of immense suffering and immense distress, we see that there is light in darkness. Just recently, someone told me this term that really struck me, 'illuminescence in darkness,' and that is what we are seeing in the suffering, struggles and injustices, that God is there. In fact, God is there even more powerful.

Can you talk more about your statement, “with privilege comes responsibility?”

The lack of universal healthcare systems and the lack of resources to pay for healthcare leads to various forms of exploitation, including sexual slavery. For me, that was a real eye-opener as a young doctor, realizing how unfair the world was in India and understanding this reality. In India, more than 70% of the people will pay out-of-pocket for their healthcare expenses. If you have assets, you sell your assets; if you have land, you can sell your land, and if you have cattle, you can sell your cattle. If you don't have either of those and you need to pay for medical expenses, you sell your family members. Since the husbands are typically the main breadwinners, then they sell either their children or their wife. This is a reality in India. Just today (March 6, 2021), there was a story in the news about a three-year-old child dying with a treatable surgical condition outside of a hospital. The hospital staff didn't even intervene in something that was obviously treatable. It occurred in broad daylight, and the news and media picked up the story. Again, it just makes those of us who are involved in providing more equitable healthcare really angry – this just shouldn't be happening. It's one thing to die of COVID or cancer, but a child shouldn't die like that outside of a hospital. But that is the reality in India; if you have the money or assets to pay, then you get the best, and if you don't, your life is expendable. This is where we should use our “privilege” to be “responsible” in helping make changes to these broken systems.

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Page 1 | 2

We'd love to hear more of your thoughts about the God Who sees and the God Who hears the cries of exploited women.

I find that really encouraging, especially with the work that I've been involved in. Re-reading the scripture and seeing how God reveals Himself in suffering, particularly to broken women, is really inspiring and reassuring to me. When I see so much brokenness, it feels like we are just making tiny steps forward. It makes me ask, 'Will it really change?' I mean the world has been messed up for centuries, and there are challenges that have been in our country for centuries, so will it really change? Then, I realize that there is a God Who has been there all along, seeing and hearing, and He is working. He is using people like you and me and others around the world to be His hands and His feet to come alongside Him and do great things. He works through us. He could just solve all the problems of injustice, trafficking, healthcare inequities, and all of the evil in this world, but He chooses to use us. That makes life worth living.