

## Should Advertising by Aesthetic Surgeons be Permitted?

The article focuses on advertisements by doctors and argues that it should be permitted. The article supports this argument by quoting instances for other professions and other countries allowing it.

It is true that several countries notably the USA recognise doctors' practice as a business and allow advertisements. In India, there has been an emphasis, perhaps somewhat an undue emphasis, on medical profession being a noble profession and hence advertisement has been disallowed and frowned upon. This however has loopholes with hospitals, spas, beauty clinics and chains owned by non-doctors advertising freely and often in a hyped and surreptitious manner. The article argues that this puts doctors at a disadvantage and hence a level playing field is necessary. A case is also made, further that investments by doctors for running their practice have increased and doctors need to get the investment back and advertisement offers a quick way of achieving this.

While this line of argument has its merits, it is important to recognise the counter arguments;

Even if permitted, can doctors afford the cost of advertisement? How will the doctors finance the cost? Won't it push up the cost of service to patients? These are real concerns. Most doctors cannot afford the cost of advertisements, which are expensive. Large hospitals, chains and large aesthetic practises only will be able to afford expensive advertisements. We are already witnessing that several corporate hospitals and clinic chains indulge in advertisements and pass on the cost to patients. This would be detrimental to the delivery of patient care, in a country like India in which most patients lack health insurance and hence pay health expenses out of their pockets.

The article argues that aesthetic surgeons should be allowed to advertise. If investments were the reason and logic, the same is applicable for laboratories, radiology clinics, etc., Hence, everyone will demand it.

How does one regulate doctors who advertise, about the veracity of claims; best doctor, number one doctor, etc.? This is indeed a very real concern as it has been seen in other countries that when allowed, doctors advertise often in a

loud way with exaggerated claims. After all, the content of advertisements is prepared by advertisement agencies. Just as we see now exaggerated and hyped advertisements with claims and counterclaims in different consumer products, we could see similar claims by doctors too. A patient will be put into difficulty of deciding the right service and separating the good from the bad.

Hence, one needs to achieve a balance between what is allowed now – which is highly restrictive – and a laissez-fair policy where advertisement would be allowed freely. Ethics should not be compromised or sacrificed at the altar of free market. Hence, the author would like to recommend that medical council needs to relax its policy and revise the guidelines for advertisements in a more open-minded way, without compromising ethics, after proper dialogue and discussion.

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