

IMA MEMBERSHIP

Sir, — This has reference to the letter by Dr. Premnath (D.H. March 2). I appreciate his point of view. The Indian Medical Council, New Delhi, and the Karnataka Medical Council have stipulated that “every physician (doctor) should identify with organised body of the profession of his country and its constituent (provincial or local) medical society” (Code of Medical Ethics No. 3).

In spite of this statutory and code of ethics, a large majority of doctors

qualified in modern medicine are estimated to be outside the folds of any professional body in the State. The above code of ethics does not specify that every doctor should be a member of IMA only. But the fact is that professional medical associations other than IMA are specialist's associations and admit only doctors with postgraduate qualifications in the respective fields.

The majority of doctors are graduates and the professional body left open to them is the IMA which is not only the representative body of the medical profession (modern scientific medicine) in the country but also the biggest professional body with more than 1,000 branches (69 branches in Karnataka alone) distributed through-

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medical profession (modern scientific medicine) in the country but also the biggest professional body with more than 1,000 branches (69 branches in Karnataka alone) distributed throughout the country at district and even taluk levels making it easily accessible to all cadres of doctors of modern medicine.

The doctor could enroll as a member of the local branch of IMA or even directly and actively participate in the affairs of the association. The membership of a professional body is both logical and imperative for a medical doctor, as he stands to gain in professional stature, medical knowledge as well as improved fellowship with the medical fraternity and public. These in the long run will benefit the doctor in particular and the community in general who after all are the ultimate beneficiaries of his knowledge and expertise.

I fell the foresight of the Government of Karnataka asking doctors in service to enroll themselves as a members of a professional body like the IMA as per medical code of ethics, is a laudable step in the right direction.



GATT AND THE INDIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Indian Consumer Protection Act

As in other countries, physicians in India are subject to the civil law of torts in respect of professional negligence, and can also be charged under the criminal law in cases involving the death of a patient. In 1986 Indian Parliament enacted a Consumer Protection Act to protect consumer interests and to provide a rapid remedy against the provision of sub-standard goods and services by traders and others. Although the drafters of the Act have admitted that it had not been their intention that it should be applied to physicians, the National Consumer Forum, set up under the Act and presided over by a High Court Judge, has decreed that physicians are subject to the provisions of the legislation.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) considers the application of the Act to physicians to be against both the long term interests of patients and the dignity of the medical profession. Therefore, the IMA appealed to the Supreme Court in India seeking to have the decree of the National Consumer Forum set aside, but the Supreme Court has upheld the decree.

Definitions

GATT (General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade) is a treaty which lays down rules for the conduct of international trade, GATT was established in 1948 with 23 members and at present it covers 117 countries which account for 80% of world trade. The main purpose of GATT is to remove trade barriers among member countries and promote world trade. It is a