



## WALK WITH DR.M.R.RAJAGOPAL -TO LEARN LESSONS FOR “HEALING BEYOND MEDICINE”

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### Abstract

In the contemporary scenario, it is obvious that the patients are to be treated by advocating highly technological based treatments in curing their diseases. Just as the field of medicine, which has become much mechanized, the doctors have also become even more mechanical in treating the patients without much inclination to treat them with empathy and compassion. The practice of medicine often emphasizes technological advancement and clinical precision. However, Dr. M. R. Rajagopal, through his book *Walk with the Weary: Life Changing Lessons in Healthcare*, challenges the healthcare community to re-center care on compassion, empathy, and human dignity. This article explores the key lessons derived from his experiences, emphasizing the transformative impact of palliative care, patient-centered approaches, and ethical responsibility in healthcare systems. It also focuses on the Case examples from his practice which enrich his reflections, illustrating the human stories that drive his philosophy.

**Keywords:** Palliative Care, Empathy, Healthcare Ethics, Patient Dignity, Compassionate Medicine, Chronic Illness, Aging Populations.

“Any cultured society has a responsibility to lend a hand to those who need it. Not everyone accepts this responsibility but many do” - Dr. Rajagopal

Dr. Rajagopal is one among many to take up the responsibility of extending help and it is reflected not only in words but also in his spirit in the form of “Pallium India”. Written in 2022, by Dr. M. R. Rajagopal, *Walk with the Weary: Life-Changing Lessons in Healthcare*, as an autobiographical account, serves as a great source of inspiration in treating the patients. Widely recognized as the “father of palliative care in India,” Dr. Rajagopal is a palliative care expert and the founder of Pallium India, a palliative care NGO. He has spent a lifetime caring for patients in pain, for which he has been awarded with Padma Shri in the palliative care. His book offers so many insightful thoughts on health care and to give an opportunity to die a dignified death. He critiques the modern healthcare and urges the people for transformation. It is all about the author's observations as a professional in the medical field and his calling and the world of Indian palliative care, how to care for others deeply and compassionately, irrespective of their background. This book teaches the readers a valuable lesson that accepting death as a natural part of life. The irony is that that the professors in medical colleges who teach daily about diseases and cures, are unaware of the need to talk about death. In this regard, this book offers so much understanding about the need to talk about the death. In the words of Shashi Tharoor who has written the foreword to this book, “Pain ultimately takes away one's dignity. Therefore, if you can ease pain, you are actually strengthening the dignity of a sufferer, and contributing a great deal to easing the memories left behind in the hearts and minds and souls of the survivors and the families. Dr. Rajagopal's work and writing makes clear that it is truly an embodiment of that famous expression; ‘to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always’”. So, the first palliative care unit established by Dr. Rajagopal in Kerala is doing a great job to provide the utmost support to the people to come out of pain.

Dr. Rajagopal's book touches upon the very important aspects of healthcare in the contemporary scenario. Healthcare today is at a crossroads where the pursuit of efficiency and technological innovation sometimes overshadows the fundamental essence of healing—the alleviation of human suffering. Dr. M. R. Rajagopal, offers a unique lens into this dilemma. His reflections in *Walk with the Weary* are not just personal anecdotes but profound lessons on the necessity of compassion-driven care. Narrated in seven sections, this book takes the readers into the personal experiences of Rajagopal as a doctor and as a human being who could understand the real pain of the patients irrespective of medicine. This article critically



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examines these lessons and their implications for global health systems, drawing on specific patient stories that shaped his philosophy.

### **Palliative Care as a Human Right :**

It is a bare fact that many people are not aware of palliative care and largely suffer until they meet the death. One of the central arguments in Rajagopal's work is that access to palliative care should be considered a fundamental human right. Millions across the globe continue to suffer needlessly due to untreated pain, lack of resources, and systemic neglect. He narrates the story of a young woman with advanced cancer who spent her final days in unbearable pain because morphine was not available in her region. This case exemplifies how policy failures translate directly into human suffering, reinforcing his advocacy for systemic reform. His message is clear: healthcare systems must ensure holistic care that addresses not only diseases but also the multifaceted dimensions of suffering and to provide proper healing mechanisms.

### **The Power of Empathy in Healing:**

Rajagopal emphasizes that medicine is not merely a science but an art deeply rooted in human connection. In one striking account, he recalls sitting with a patient who was terminally ill and frightened. Instead of offering clinical reassurances, he simply listened. The patient later expressed gratitude—not for medical interventions but for the dignity of being heard. Such experiences reveal how empathy can be as therapeutic as any medication. By “walking with the weary,” caregivers bridge the gap between clinical detachment and authentic healing relationships. This human touch, which is missing in the treatment of a patient now a days is to be highly considered by the doctors.

Dr.Rajagopal also speaks about the death illiteracy in India . He opines that every individual must be aware of the concept of death and the readiness to accept it . Many people in India don't even want to utter the word 'death' considering it as something very weary and granted by the Gods immediately after listening this word. As per him, 'preparing for the worst' will certainly make individuals to die with dignity. He writes, “Modern families tend to shield children from inconveniences such as death. I remember a former colleague's grandson being sent away from his dying father's bedside to an uncle's house so he could prepare for his high school examination. The boy was denied his last hug, and the last tears he would shed for his father. He was denied the time to grieve and with that a chance for healing. The scars would remain for a long time”(9) He wants that every individual must be death literate in the sense that they should accept it as a reality and be given a chance to express the emotions associated with the death of their loved ones. The real empathy for the bereaved families lies in this kind of attitude.

### **Crossing the Ethical Dilemmas: Lessons in Ethical Responsibility**

Healthcare professionals face complex ethical dilemmas, from resource allocation to end-of-life care. Rajagopal recounts the ethical struggle of caring for a father who wanted to shield his family from his terminal diagnosis. Respecting his autonomy while ensuring transparency with his loved ones required careful, compassionate navigation. Such cases highlight the importance of integrity and sensitivity in ethical decision-making. His insistence on prioritizing patient dignity serves as a reminder that healthcare is not merely about prolonging life but about respecting the humanity of those we serve.

### **Redefining Success in Medicine:**

Conventional definitions of medical success often revolve around cure rates and clinical outcomes. Rajagopal proposes a paradigm shift: success in healthcare must also be measured by how well suffering is alleviated and dignity preserved. He recalls the story of an elderly woman with advanced illness who expressed relief not from cure but from the simple assurance that she would not die in pain. For Rajagopal, such moments redefine the very essence of medical accomplishment. He recollects a British nurse-turned-physician, Cicely Saunders, who introduced effective pain management to the medical community insisting that dying people deserve dignity, compassion , and respect.



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## Global Implications for Healthcare Systems:

The lessons from *Walk with the Weary* resonate beyond the Indian context, offering guidance for global healthcare systems. By integrating palliative care into mainstream healthcare, training professionals in empathy, and ensuring equitable access to pain relief, patient experiences can be transformed worldwide. His patient stories act as moral case studies, urging health systems to prioritize compassion as much as clinical efficiency.

## Connecting with Contemporary Global Challenges:

Rajagopal's insights also speak directly to modern healthcare challenges. With rapidly aging populations, rising incidences of chronic illnesses, and the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, the need for palliative and supportive care has never been greater. For instance, elderly patients often face prolonged suffering due to fragmented healthcare systems that prioritize acute interventions over long-term comfort. Similarly, those with chronic illnesses like cancer, kidney disease, or dementia require continuous support that extends beyond clinical treatment. Rajagopal's approach offers a blueprint: healthcare must move toward models that integrate curative, preventive, and palliative care, ensuring that individuals are supported through every stage of illness. His call for compassion-driven systems resonates strongly in an era where global health must balance technological progress with human dignity.

## Conclusion

Dr. M. R. Rajagopal's *Walk with the Weary* is more than a memoir; it is a call to action. Through deeply human stories, his insights remind healthcare professionals and policymakers that healing begins with walking alongside the suffering, listening with empathy, and acting with compassion. In an era where healthcare risks becoming impersonal, Rajagopal's vision urges us to rehumanize medicine—ensuring that no patient walks the path of suffering alone. The reader is invited to follow along as he learns, by listening to his patients' stories, how to treat the patient and not just the disease. *Walk with the Weary* is certainly a masterclass in how to take care for others deeply and compassionately no matter who they are and draws the attention of everyone to world of Indian palliative care.

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