

Quality? Show Me the Money First

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In the bad old days of the USSR, there was a shoe factory that makes shoes in one ugly design, in one standard size.

One day, a management guru & quality advocate asked the manager why don't they improve their quality by having better designs & make shoes that at least fit their customers' feet. The manager gruffly said with the contempt he reserved for such

ivory tower types, "Oh yeah? Who is going to pay for all these quality mumbo jumbo?

And can't you see we are already so busy making the shoes. Customers? Look at the long queues in the stores, they can't get enough of the shoes we make."



Indeed there was a long queue of

people shivering in the snow, waiting for their ration of shoes. Horribly crafted & ill-fitting but the demand was insatiable. People get their shoes & traded them with people who had bread but no shoes. Others rip up the shoes & use the leather as raw materials to make wallets and belts, and sometimes better shoes. Sometimes, if they were lucky, the ugly shoe fits. This is the tragic cost of low quality & we live with it everyday. The Berlin

wall may have crumbled and Communism presumed dead but there is a little bit of the evil empire in everything around us. Ugly and ill fitting shoes are everywhere and we hobble along each day.

Consider the health care system for one. Ask any stakeholder in the system and you will get a earful of how bad things are in various areas. Long queues of patients wait for hours for a dose of health care that sometimes does not really meet their needs. Poor outcome of chronic diseases testifies to the low quality of the system. Underemployed family doctors in private practice try to make ends meet by doing more of the same in ever-longer hours and at ever-lower prices.

The answer lies not in more bellyaching but on insisting on quality. Quality is a double-edged sword. As you demand quality from the system, so shall the system demand quality from you. For this reason many would blink and prefer the safe comfort of mediocrity. People put up with low quality, busy working in factories that make low quality shoes & bearing the pain of wearing the same shoes that system dish out to them.

At the end of the day is it worth it? Like the proverbial frog that is boiled alive by slowly increasing the temperature of the water, is it not better to make a leap for quality? Vocational training is the first of many steps in the reform of primary care. The light at the end of the tunnel is a better state of health for our nation and job satisfaction for our doctor & yes, a decent sum of money for a job well done. It is a long road ahead but at least we begin t h e journey with a nice pair of shoes.

