Is Modern Medicine ‘Stuck in a Rut?’

Indraneel Mittra worries about the state of medicine today. A Senior Consultant Cancer Surgeon and Convener of the Research Department at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in India, Mittra wonders what has happened to all the great medical innovations of the past. His article “Why is Modern Medicine Stuck in a Rut?” appears in the most recent issue of the journal Perspectives of Biology and Medicine (Volume 52, Number 4). The journal is published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. Mittra contrasts the first 30 years after World War II with the last three decades.

“In short, the first three decades after the war truly represented the golden age of modern medicine,” he writes, adding, “what we are witnessing is fine-tuning and value additions to older (discoveries) made possible by advances in computation and engineering.”

Mittra does point out that the past 30 years have included significant advances such as the identification of HIV as the cause of AIDS and the development of anti-viral therapies. However, he believes that “these achievements pale when seen against the extent of financial and human resources” on medical research since the 1970s.

Two factors have played a key role in this change, Mittra writes – the marginalization of the individual researcher and the growth of randomized clinical trials funded by pharmaceutical companies.

“The research agenda of the medical fraternity is largely dictated by the commercial interests of pharmaceutical companies,” he writes. “Clearly, we need to bring the individual investigator back to center stage of biomedical research and to provide him with ample funding and opportunities to pursue the much neglected hypothesis-driven patient-centric, innovative research.”

Mittra thinks the medical community has a lot of hard work ahead to return to the paradigm which resulted in the “utopian optimism and creative” energy of post-war research.

“There are no quick solutions, for the rut is deep and is both ideological and philosophical, compounded by commercial vested interests,” he writes. “The first step towards getting out of the rut is to acknowledge that we are in it, followed by deep introspection and serious debate. The time may have come to start that process.”

About The Johns Hopkins University Press
Founded in 1878, The Johns Hopkins University Press is recognized as one of the world’s finest and most accomplished scholarly publishers. Today, in addition to a broad catalog of titles, The Press publishes more than 60 scholarly periodicals and more than 200 new books each year in the arts and humanities, technology and medicine, higher education, history, political science, and library science.