

Quotable Quotes from the 2000 SMA Lecture, “Medicine in the Digital Era – Opportunities and Challenges”

“Compared with the non-physician colleague, online doctors generally rate the Net as less useful for tasks ranging from patient education to claims processing. This mismatch potentially spell trouble because the healthcare executives are counting on physicians as part of their own online plan and are spending billions of dollars to achieve this.”

“Only a small proportion of patients believe that doctors will answer e-mails personally. This is because doctors are not paid for email encounters. There is also the problem of security, privacy and of course if you have to answer 30 emails a day, it takes up a lot of your time.”

“The medical office of today is a bottle neck of episodic care that does a poor job of healing. The physician is fed up with chunky medical records, misplaced

reports, lost X-rays and incessant telephone interruption. Information technology’s greatest contribution would be to restore to the doctor the clinical minutes and hours stolen from his or her day with patients.”

EPILOGUE

“Someday

Doctors will be measured not by the number of patients we see but by the quality of care we provide.

Doctors will be free to care for patients in the best way, determined only by their needs and not by financial incentives.

Patients will be able to communicate with us at any time, without the barriers posed by answering service and call centres.

Patients will gain ownership over their health and healthcare, with unlimited access to medical information and their records.

All current medical information will

be available immediately as we decipher our patients’ problems.

And when that day comes, we will be our patients’ consultants, advisers, confidantes and caregivers - their true personal physicians.

This can happen now, starting today with the new information technology.” ■



Prof Chong Kim Chong, Head, Department of Philosophy, NUS, presents the Ethics Essay Award to Miss Jane Tan.

SMA Ethics Essay Award 2000

The SMA Ethics Award is intended to promote awareness and develop a wider interest in issues concerning medical ethics by encouraging tertiary students in Singapore to research and review important aspects of medical ethics. The Award which was first started in 1999 is in the form of a sum of \$1000. The Award is open to two categories, Medical Undergraduates and Non-Medical Undergraduates. Miss Jane Tan, a third year law student is the winner of the non-medical undergraduate category this year. There is no winner for the medical category this year.

Précis of “Professionalism in Medical Practice: Physician to Physician Relationship in the Singapore Context”

With rapid technological advances,

economic primacy and individualism, the existence of something most basic and fundamental which doctors all over the world are presumed to possess – that of medical professionalism, is being tremendously challenged today. Such a societal change cannot be ignored. Otherwise, what has been described as a “structurally stabilizing, morally protective force.., a cornerstone of a stable society” will be destroyed. Professionalism cannot afford to succumb to the tide, for without such a constant, the society will be lost, mutated and wrecked in its multitude of changes and complexities. Moreover, doctors are widely regarded as highly knowledgeable professionals with high moral standing and virtues. This has been, is still and must continue to be.

A definition which simply demands doctors to have integrity, altruism and

expertise would totally reduce this discussion to a mere rhetoric. In fact, any attempt to define this word would prove futile for it presupposes a lack of definition due to its all-encompassing and intangible nature. Hence, it is submitted that “professionalism” be dealt with by looking at the “various moments of clinical truths” where tangible action is most-telling.

Firstly, doctors have a duty to teach not only medical students but also their fellow colleagues. Skills and cutting-edge technology must be imparted for the patients’ best interest. Doctors must never attempt to keep such knowledge to oneself for fear of losing standing, fame or glory. The patients’ benefit always takes priority. Besides the academic type of education, doctors can also educate by being exemplary role models. For instance, by

The Internet – Ways to Get Connected

In our bid to get more SMA Members online, here is some information on some of the connectivity packages offered by the major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Singapore. This chart offers an easy-to-understand cross-comparison of some of the more popular packages available. Hence, Members may choose wisely according to one's needs.

Connection	Packages	Features	One-time Costs	Monthly Charges	Contact	Remarks
Broadband	SCV Max Online	Speed up to 1500K high bandwidth, always connected, no phone line needed, multimedia access, no access charges (unlimited). http://www.scv.com.sg/maxonline	Registration - free Modem - on loan free Installation - \$51.50 Extra connectivity - \$120.45	\$76 first 12 mths; \$96 subsequently	873-7373	Broadband is extremely fast. SCV's installation is more efficient compared to Magix's and Singnet's. Speed is also faster over Magix's and Singnet's. Magix's and Singnet's rates are slightly lower than SCV's if one doesn't surf a lot.
	Magix Premium	Speed up to 512K high bandwidth, fax and phone functions enabled while online, Video-On-Demand services. http://www.magix.com.sg	Registration - \$30 Modem - \$299 Installation - free	\$60 for 20 free hours; \$120 for 60 free hours. Excess: \$0.05 per minute.	1800 438-4338	
	Singnet Broadband	Same as Magix's features. Difference: volume-based over time-based charges. http://www.singnet.com.sg/product/broadband	Registration - \$150 Modem - \$69-89 Installation - \$150	\$55 - 250MB \$75 - 500MB \$115 - 1000MB Excess - \$2.95 per 10MB	1800 838-3899	
Corporate Leased Line	Pacific Internet	Speed from 64K to 256K, 24-hour dedicated link from company's Local Area Network to the Internet. http://www2.pacfusion.com.sg/products/access/corporate/leased	Registration - \$500 Modem - \$1440 Installation - \$70 Router - on loan free	\$988 - 64K \$2088 - 128K \$4088 - 256K Phone charges	872-9800	Advantage: own server in the office, plus dedicated connectivity.
Personal ISDN	Pacific Internet	Speed of up to 128K, dedicated digital line, fax and phone functions enabled while online, call setup 2-4 secs only. http://www2.pacfusion.com.sg/products/access/dialup/isdn	Registration - \$39.95 Modem - \$50-70 Installation - free starter-kit, DIY	\$15.95 - 13hrs \$29.95 - 32hrs \$59.95 - 150hrs Excess: \$3.95 per hour Phone charges	1800 872-1455	Advantage: dedicated (not shared) connectivity; one has entire 128K to oneself.
Dial-up	PacNet, Starhub, Singnet	Speed from 28.8K to 56K depending on modem, email account, personal homepage space. http://www2.pacfusion.com.sg/products/access/dialup/basic/ http://www1.starhub.net.sg/homeprod.html http://www.singnet.com.sg/product/dialup.html	Registration - \$30-40 Modem - \$50-120 Installation - free, DIY	\$2.95 (2hrs) - \$100 (unlimited) Phone charges	872-1455 (Pacnet) 825-7900 (Starhub) 838-3899 (Singnet)	Inexpensive and rather reliable. Not as fast as Broadband or ISDN though. Call setup about 30secs.
Surf for Free	Starhub	Speed from 28.8K to 56K, surf for free, no email account. http://member.mystarhub.com.sg/download/instruction.html download, DIY	Registration - free Modem - \$50-120 Installation - free incurred.	Free; only telephone charges online.	No number; register	Connectivity is not very reliable; but hey, it's free!

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behaving professionally towards patients, colleagues and even patients' relatives.

Secondly, the profession must operate under self-regulation. Where doctors are negligent or have flouted certain rules, disciplinary action must be taken. Cases not amounting to gross negligence or misconduct and might actually require whistle blowing include the unnecessary testing of patients for monetary gains and the issue regarding the shelf-life of older surgeons. These must be dealt with the right amount of discretion and intervention. Ultimately, doctors must always remember that "the practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling,

not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head."

Thirdly, physicians must work together as a team to strive towards the goal of making our health-care system a world-class one. With greater interaction comes increased friction be it in diagnosis, treatment or just human relations. Doctors must deal with such problems professionally and give due respect to the experience and competence of others. Where doctors are unsure, they should never feel embarrassed to seek advice from fellow colleagues. Additionally, doctors should not be promoted or deemed successful purely on the basis of the number of patients seen or amount

of money that the doctor has earned for the organisation. Rather, other factors like capability, patient-management, skills, etc. should be taken into consideration.

Finally, the profession must continue to waive the professional fees when called to treat their colleagues for this is a highly laudable practice that demarcates this profession from others.

In conclusion, one must recognise that professionalism is a term that defies definition and penetrates into every aspect of a doctor's life. The above-stated situations are just but some aspects. It is not exhaustive. Ultimately, what we have to realise is that for us to have what we call a civilisation, professionalism must be here to stay. ■