

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