

# Dreams and Ruminations

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

Moving onward! All I want to do when I wake up every morning is to take a look through my patient's eyes.

Do we prefer to look at healthcare through our patients' eyes or bow to our fraternity's approval so that we may see eye to eye with our colleagues? It's a delicate balance, but one we have to tread as we are trying to make healthcare more patient-centric.

## Understanding patients

Does this mean that we have to know what different patients want? Do we have to know their likes and dislikes, their preferences on how they receive advice and are informed on treatment choices? When we have an established patient-doctor relationship that spans a decade or more, will we always know what is material to that patient? Our patients want their right to be heard yet they know they are at a disadvantage as they lack domain knowledge. Will this information asymmetry influence them to change their

minds as to what is material to them when things don't turn out well?

Some patients come in and quote "Dr Google", but you will find that the context is often missing. When your patients do this, it may ruffle your feathers. However, a good doctor will need to be patient and spend time on the patient sitting in front of them to make a relevant analysis in the right context.

What can patients do when they encounter alarming medical news that appear seemingly true (eg, that vaccinations cause autism)? Many laymen will choose to believe the fake news and use them to challenge our best effort to be true to our profession. When fake news spreads like wildfire in the public domain, it becomes very real to our patients who may choose to believe what they hear and read. We should strive to dispel the myths.

I believe that our patients have to trust their personal or family doctor whom they have chosen because that

doctor will do his/her best for the patients. That doctor of choice would have stood the reasonable test of time and possess qualities that the patients like and prefer. These qualities may be the way he/she explains various medical conditions and steps that the patient needs to undertake to be on the road to recovery. Some patients may prefer certain doctors by the way they break bad news and their use of the right comforting demeanor.

## Thinking of the future

We have to do our part but what happens if we only see this as a day job or an occupation to bring home the bacon? I believe that once you are a medical doctor, you will always be one till you retire. However, in this day and age, how many would share my view? I hear through the grapevine that many would disagree with me, and that our younger generation of doctors may only see medicine as an occupation and not as a profession. At the opposite end, while we try our best, our patients need to



reciprocate and understand that we too are humans with bodily and psychological needs.

As I move into the later part of my life with my cohort, I often wonder who will look after the older generation of doctors when they succumb to sickness. How will the older generation of doctors manage their expectations of the younger generation of doctors and vice versa?

Perhaps we need to work harder to groom our children, students and interns early on in life. We should instill values that physicians are expected to hold steadfast throughout our lifetimes. We would need to select those who have the heart and inspire them at a tender age so that they may seek that calling when the time comes. We will need to set good role models for them to follow.

### **The threat of AI**

What we endeavour to do may come to naught if society changes and expects all doctors to behave similarly

or be replaced by robots with artificial intelligence (AI) and deep learning. Perhaps one day AI may even simulate compassion and empathy instead of merely having the superhuman capability of processing mountains of data and quoting them accordingly.

How many of our colleagues can see this problem and attempt to make a change? How many can see the problem but will only whine repeatedly? How many are oblivious and will only worry when the machines start to appear at our front doors to take our jobs away?

I am up now, having just woken up from a nightmare. We need to really wake up and get out of our comfort zone. While the Ministry of Health plans the next step with a focus on the sustainability of healthcare, and monitoring and managing the health of the population, our medical community should seriously think not only about our future but beyond that. I look forward to your support in the coming months. ♦

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is also a member of the current National General Practitioner Advisory Panel. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.

