

The EDITORS' MUSINGS



Dr Tina Tan

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist with the Better Life Psychological Medicine Clinic and a visiting consultant at the Institute of Mental Health. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

The focus of this month's issue is on pathology and the amazing work that goes on behind the scenes of the various pathology settings here in Singapore. I am especially grateful to my guest editor, A/Prof Cuthbert Teo, for coordinating the various authors and contributions and for garnering the beautiful photographs that we have showcased this month.

Pathology is not a field for all of us in the medical profession, but its role in medicine cannot be understated. The articles featured here are meant to bring the work of our pathology colleagues to the forefront, and act as a commemoration of the important contributions that they make to our own daily practice of medicine.

While not pathology-related, the article by Danielle Sim and Dr Alex Cheng highlights the need for better surrogacy laws to be implemented in Singapore. This is a highly-controversial topic, but the authors have suggested an approach that would be useful for our policy-makers looking into this issue, especially with our low fertility rates.

Happy reading!

The origins of the use of science and medicine in law are hidden in the mists of the past. The advent of written history gives us a glimpse into the early use of forensic medicine and science. Around 2660 BC, Imhotep, priest and physician to the Pharaoh Zoser, investigated deaths in the royal family. The body of the assassinated Julius Caesar was examined by Antistius in 44 BC, and in the 13th century, Song Ci in China published a textbook which included a story about identifying a killer through the use of flies attracted to the sickle which was used as the murder weapon. Since then, forensic science and medicine have progressed to a point where they provide the scientific evidence to prove or disprove a crime. Research in forensic science and medicine must stay at the cutting edge so that evidence can be relied upon in court. The authors of our Feature article, "The NUS Forensic Science Laboratory", give a brief peek into some of the research work carried out in toxicology, dactylography and entomology.

In 3rd century BC, a Greek school of anatomy had been established in Alexandria where autopsies were conducted. Subsequently, Leonardo da Vinci produced meticulous drawings of the human body from dissection, while the Italian anatomist Giovanni Battista Morgagni published his five-volume *On the Seats and Causes of Disease Investigated by Anatomy* where he attempted to correlate

A/Prof Cuthbert Teo

Guest Editor

A/Prof Teo is a forensic pathologist by training, and an adjunct associate professor at the Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore. The views expressed in the editorial are his personal opinions.

disease with autopsy findings. We take a "visual stroll" through the garden of pathology in Clinical Assistant Prof Leow's photo essay.

At a basic level, the discipline of pathology looks at the cause of disease from macroscopic and microscopic morphology. The mental process of interpretation in pathology involves the stimulus of the image entering the eye, to recognition and understanding of the image in the brain. This mental process is also part of the visual arts, so it is no wonder that pathologists behold beauty in gross specimens and histology slides. Anatomy teaches us order; pathology teaches disorder. When that disordered cell comes from your loved one, it may be very difficult to find any beauty in it at all. Those cells that pathologists see have the potential to start a cascade of events from worry, to surgery, to possible death. Pathologists always remember that what we find exciting and beautiful, can be devastating for the patient. I share Prof Leow's marvel at the sparkle of colours like those of a calm lake. I also know that a raging storm could lie ahead with waves breaking the water's calmness. ♦