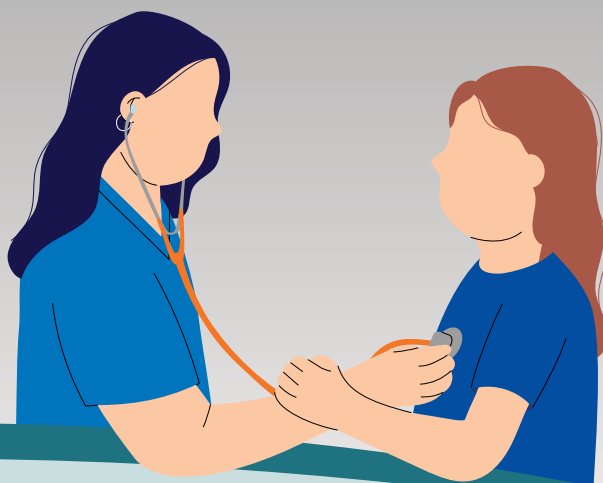


# Left-Handed Girl

Text by Dr Tan Su-Ming



The beautiful family of three stepped into my consultation room: mum, dad and daughter aged 12. They were here for the influenza vaccine and playfully bantered about who should be the first to get their shot. The father sat down first. I asked, "Are you right- or left-handed?" and put the vaccine in his left deltoid when he answered, "Right-handed." He was followed by the mum, who was right-handed too. Finally, the daughter sat down. I busied myself with the pre-filled syringe and without looking up, asked her the same question. "Are you right- or left-handed?"

"Left, I suppose," she said, which I found an odd reply.

I looked up from my desk to look at her properly for the first time, and realised that she had been born with only one good arm. Her right arm was a rudimentary stump about six inches long from the shoulder. No fingers.

I felt mortified, and she probably saw that in my face, but her features remained soft and she showed no offence.

"I am so sorry I asked you such a stupid question," was all I could offer up in that moment.

With an air of maturity beyond her years, she reassured me that it was fine. To cover up for my embarrassment, I quickly made small talk and learnt that she was a Paralympic swimmer.

Note to self: Please, please, no matter how busy or rushed you are, please do take the time to really see the person in front of you. ♦

Dr Tan graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1990. She is married with a daughter and runs her own general practice.



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