

The Influence of a Father

Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

It is 15 June 2025, Father's Day, as I pen my thoughts. On this day, I reflect on how my choice of career, how I treat patients and how I ended up doing medical advocacy were unconscious reflections of my father's actions and deeds.

Though my father was a doctor, he has never asked me to take up medicine as a career, and neither did he extol the virtues and advantages of being a doctor. He worked the typical long hours of a solo GP. I remember that he would always take his morning walk before driving to work. Although his clinic was supposed to start at 9 am, he would often arrive only about half an hour later. His patients did not mind waiting for him. Looking back, I suppose he preferred having a queue of patients as he started work. He would then come home for dinner before making his way back to work again for night clinic.

I never questioned why he worked such long hours; it just seemed natural to me. I enjoyed the occasional visits to his clinic, and his staff (who are still working for him after all these years) were always happy to see me. I would potter around the dispensary area and marvel at the drawers of medication and the large plastic bottles of cough mixture. Many of his patients were locals, either living in the neighbourhood or working in the market and food centre located just opposite his

clinic. From the relaxed conversations my father had with them, and the occasional packets of food that they would gift him, I witnessed the bond that he had with his loyal patients.

Many patients would prefer to see him, even for routine consultations, and on the rare occasions when he was on leave, they would wait for him to return rather than see the covering locum doctor. Years later, as a doctor myself, I came to see some of his patients for urinary tract problems, and they told me about what a good doctor he was.

He also served the community through grassroots work at the nearby community centre and provided pro bono medical consultations for a nursing home and a day care centre. He was also actively involved in the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) as a council member and honorary treasurer. Strangely, he did not tell me much about what he did in CFPS, but other people have shared with me about his work and some of what he accomplished is publicly available on the Internet. All the same, I wandered along the same path and eventually became involved in a professional body as well.

My father is still working, although he has substantially scaled down his working hours. Much like many doctors

who have worked a lifetime taking care of patients, he finds it difficult to retire.

Perhaps I was subconsciously motivated to become a doctor by my father's work ethic and his role in the community. My elder son has since also become interested in a medically related career, although I have tried my best to give him a balanced picture of the prospects and encouraged him to explore other paths. I guess it truly is the influence of a father.

By the time you read this, the occasion will be long over, but nonetheless I would like to wish all fathers reading this a belated Happy Father's Day! ♦

Dr Ng is a urologist in private practice and current President of the SMA. He has two teenage sons whom he hopes will grow much taller than him. He has probably collected too many watches for his own good.

