

# TGWANA!

By Dr Quah Thuan Chong

Last week, I saw a little fighter from Batam. She was a one-and-a-half-year-old girl, wailing and protesting at the top of her voice as she was brought to the clinic by her father, mother and grandmother. The girl had severe eczema and plenty of enlarged cervical nodes, and the referral was for management of lymphadenopathy.

As thorough as my examination for this little fighter could be while she was fighting me with all her might, she did not have any other lymphadenopathy, hepatosplenomegaly, or any other red flags suggesting something sinister.

I told the grandmother, who was obviously the one in charge, that the lymphadenopathy was very likely reactive and not a sign of any serious disease. As she still looked worried, albeit less so than at the beginning of the consultation, I asked her what her concerns were. She replied, "Doctor, you know lah!"

I thought I knew her worry ("Ha! Granny must be worried about cancer!"), and decided to arrange for a full blood count. The report came in after 20 minutes, and it was all clear. My clinic nurse printed out the report on a beautiful piece of green paper, and showed it to Grandma. I went through the different items of the test report with her, stressing the normality of the blood counts. Upon knowing the test results, Grandma beamed, and finally looked relaxed. At the end of the consultation, I gave her my handphone number, and told her that she could bring her granddaughter to see me any time if her nodes became bigger, or if she had other worries pertaining to her granddaughter's health. The family then happily paid for the consultation and lab fees, and went home to Batam.

Later, I asked myself, how can you be sure that it's not lymphoma, histiocytosis, metastatic neuroblastoma, or Kikuchi's disease, and so on?

Yes, I certainly could not be sure, but if the chance of such serious conditions is less than 1%, should I still tell Grandma? Medical ethics state that patients should have autonomy – should I give Grandma autonomy, list down the litany of possible conditions, and let her decide?

I then thought to myself, TGWANA – *Thank God We Are Not Americans!* We practice paternalistic Medicine when we consider it wise to do so. We take the burdens of uncertainty (after all, isn't this what Medicine is all about – uncertainties?) upon ourselves, instead of putting them on our patients and their families. We dare to be, when the occasion justifies it, "unfashionably paternalistic"!

Is it unethical?

So would it have been better to investigate further? Should I have sent the girl's nodes for biopsy? Should I have done some imaging for her – CXR or CT scan, or PET-CT scan? The family didn't look rich, but apart from cost issues, would it have been right for me to go ahead and do these tests? They are simple Indonesians with great trust in the Singapore brand. It's so easy to exploit this trust, since they will never sue you anyway.

What would you do? Would you say – TGWANA? **SMA**



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