

WHAT TALKING YOU?

By Dr Jonathan Tan, Editorial Board Member

IN THE MEDICAL profession, the repercussions of a rapidly ageing and greying population are all too real. Enter the foreign-trained doctor. Who better to save the day?

However, communicating in a land where people speak at a breakneck pace, with confusing acronyms, and words from different dialects thrown in for good measure, can be challenging to say the least.

Of course, if you are charming and have an exotic *angmoh* accent, adding a “*lah*” behind everything you say is more than enough to set the aunties and nurses swooning. That’s the cheat code to making yourself understood in Singapore, or so says my trauma consultant. Alas, for lesser mortals, it is important to have a more in-depth grasp of Singlish, medical version 1.0.



TO START off, some medical terms to help you get through that first ward round.

- *Pang sai/pui/jio*: basic bodily functions that will make your surgical consultants’ day.
- *Tiah/sakit*: excellent, now you know what “pain” is respectively in Hokkien and Malay, good luck with getting a pain score.
- *Koyok*: helps the above (will make you popular with anyone above 65).
- Sell *koyok*: something you do before getting consent from patients for elective surgery.
- *Jiak/makan*: things you don’t want the patients to have done before surgery.
- *Tau hin/tau gong gong*: vertiginous or non-vertiginous giddiness – could mean anything.
- *Siao*: time to “Refer Psych”.
- Blue letter: can’t remember how to

read an electrocardiogram? Time to write one!

- KIV: better do it anyway, it’s only a matter of time.
- DIL/DDIL: prepare not to sleep tonight.
- PFO (prepare for operation): can be used for the uncle with the fracture, or that pretty nurse/medical student/house officer (HO) taking care of him.

Next, key descriptors to gauge what your colleagues and seniors ACTUALLY think about you.

- A bit the slow/blur/*buay zi dong*: your work is being given to the other medical officer for a reason.
- CMI (cannot make it): maybe it’s time to consider another specialty.
- Champion: don’t be mistaken, this is used sarcastically.
- Steady: you’ve impressed them.
- *Zai*: time to apply for residency!
- *Chio/yandao*: congratulations! Nice on-call meals are coming your way!
- *Thambi*: that’s your job!
- Arrows: embrace them, that’s what *thambis* do!

Lastly, some simple words to express yourself with.

- *Suay*: did you eat *bao* (that’s a whole other lesson) – why so many resuscitations on call?
- Shagged: not a good thing, it’s how you feel after being *suay*.
- *Paiseh*: when you can’t set a plug and your HO can.
- *Heng*: no one asked you any questions during the grand ward round.
- *Shiok*: you get to operate on the case you PFO-ed!

Congratulations, you’ve now completed a crash course in Singlish! Time to try some of these lines on the next patient you see. There’s nothing more endearing to a patient than their doctor making an effort to connect and communicate, in a way that puts them at ease. ■



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