

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF



A while back, a doctor I knew committed suicide. It was sudden and tragic. There were no warning signs; everything seemed to be going perfectly for this colleague. Yet, on hindsight, there probably were clues that things weren't as rosy as they seemed.

The truth is that we are as human as the patients who consult us. The same qualities that make a good doctor increase the likelihood of mental illness — we can be perfectionists with high expectations of ourselves and others, with a correspondingly low tolerance for uncertainty. That combined with work factors, such as long hours or lack of support, all increase the likelihood of physical and mental illness in doctors.

Psychiatric problems in doctors are complicated with no easy answers due to the ethical issues involved. Dr Tor Phern Chern explains why doctors are prone to depression and how to seek help for a colleague in need and Dr G Kandasami covers an equally hushed-up topic — dependence and addiction in doctors.

Our "Feature" article, therefore, focuses on how we can maintain our physical and mental well-being. Dr Chong Yeh Woei shares his insights about "walking the talk" that we always like to nag our patients about. Our "Indulge" article looks at unique and healthy ways some doctors have found to unwind and stay fit at the same time. Still have a dearth of ideas? Miss Ralene Sim shares her heart-warming experience of volunteering with Project Yangon last year, reminding

us that altruism may well be the medicine that we need.

So what happens when a doctor does fall sick? No doubt that stigma exists. Doctors who are willing to share their perspective of needing medical treatment are few and far between. Beyond the worry of time taken away from our busy work schedules, is the worry that news of our ailments will get around. So much is at stake — our careers, our livelihoods. It is little wonder that doctors don't seek help when they need it, nor do they want to talk about it thereafter. Thus, it is with sincerity that our Editor, Dr Tan Yia Swam, shares her heartfelt experiences as a patient to encourage our readers not to remain silent but to seek help for their problems. In addition, our "GP Matters" column includes a call for the medical profession in Singapore to provide resources for fellow physicians in need.

On the lighter side of things, A/Prof Cuthbert Teo continues his series on the history of medicine in Singapore, showcasing humorous medical student memories from the 1930s and 40s. It proves that even our oldest professors were once medical students who weren't always on their best behaviour.

In his article about scholarship, A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean shares his passion for convivial learning and teaching. It's the presence of that merry and mentally stimulating atmosphere that keeps us refreshed from the daily drudgeries of our work, both for the teacher and student.

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Tina Tan
Deputy Editor

Dr Hsu Li Yang provides a timely and much needed commentary on the Zika virus, including a reminder of the key question to ask our patients — their travel history.

We also report here the latest news from the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism, and an article by Dr Hairil that teases out the unique ethical issues anaesthetists face. They may be behind the screens but their responsibility as healthcare providers is as crucial as that of a patient's primary physician.

On a final note, I want to announce that SMA News will be providing more exclusive online content, such as articles ahead of print, videos and audio clips, for our members.

Keep calm, and read your issue of SMA News! ♦