



A LOT TO THINK ABOUT

Text by Dr Teo Boon See

Some time back, I attended a three-day course for doctors organised by SMA. Most of the doctors at the course were young trainee doctors. I, as a senior family physician, was probably the oldest doctor there.

The course was conducted in a hotel ballroom. Next to this ballroom was a car park. There was a parking lot for the disabled right in front of the entrance to the ballroom. The car park was too small, but nonetheless, people respected the handicapped logo and avoided the lot – at least for the first two days.

On the final day of the course, I arrived early, and witnessed a luxury car parking into that very lot. Out of the car strode a young man carrying the course file – clearly a young medical colleague.

I asked the young doctor if he knew that the lot was reserved for the disabled. He was taken aback and asked me what that meant. I clarified that it was a lot reserved for the disabled and he should not park his car there. He replied that he did not think anyone else would need it and walked off toward the ballroom.

I was upset, but I reserved judgement in case he was having a

toilet emergency. Evidently he was not, as he settled down at his table instead. After a few minutes, I approached him at his table hoping to get to know him better. We exchanged pleasantries and I found out he was a young registrar in one of the restructured hospitals, and that he was “exiting” soon. Throughout this conversation, I did not get any sense of awkwardness or embarrassment from him.

After I left him, I was deeply perturbed and I prayed for wisdom to handle this matter. In the end, I felt led to move my car and to offer him my lot instead. He was now having coffee with a colleague. I interrupted them and urged him to move his car to my now-empty lot to vacate the disabled lot. He acknowledged my offer without gratitude. He continued to chat with his colleague and finally moved his car after he had finished his coffee.

If you are wondering which course this was, it was the SMA Ethics Course! This course has been made compulsory for advanced specialist training (AST) and family medicine (FM) trainees as part of their training. What an irony it was.

Just a few days prior to the course, I was in Tokyo with a friend and we took a ride on a public bus. At one bus stop,

an old man in a wheelchair wanted to disembark. I witnessed the young bus driver, who was in his twenties, stop the bus, manually unfold a ramp and wheel the old man off the bus.

Returning to the bus, the driver then saw an umbrella left behind, where the old man’s wheelchair had been. He left the bus again, running after the old man to return the umbrella.

The entire time, all our fellow passengers waited patiently. When the bus driver finally returned to the bus a few minutes later, my friend and I applauded and cheered him for doing what I thought was an exceptional gesture.

And so, within the span of a week, I witnessed two young men’s behaviour towards the disabled. I felt grieved that of all the people who could have caused the offence, it came from one of our own.

Surely, we can do better! ♦

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