

WE SET THE TONE

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

We often encounter crossroads at critical times of our lives. We may be in better situations at times and in less favourable situations at others. Someone once said, "Good fortune is often sandwiched between two adversities and vice versa." We may be cruising along in life but inevitably we will hit a crossroad.

For this month's column, I would like to share some discussions based on snippets that I have heard from my friends over these past months, and how they reminded me about how I should respond.

In the face of difficulties

I know everything happens for a reason. Sometimes I wish I was omnipotent and knew what those reasons were.

We all have perfect visual acuity when looking at events and issues retrospectively. Making the right decision is never easy, if not impossible, on many occasions. If we had thought about the various possible outcomes carefully, after weighing the pros and cons, I think one should not be faulted for making unintentional errors in our assessment of our patients that result in undesirable outcomes. We should be allowed to be given opportunities to make amends. To err is human. We make mistakes; we can only project the likely outcomes based on past experiences and past records.

You often hear that everybody perishes; it's a matter of whether it is sooner or later.

Somebody may publicly declare they are not afraid of mortality but when the suffering comes, will they bend over and shrivel up? They may harbour the flawed thinking that they could choose a quick and painless exit over a long drawn-out bedridden and vegetative existence.

Leaving our loved ones in a state of prolonged grief, regret



and remorse is certainly not our original intention. Some patients will make decisions on treatment based on how it will negatively impact their children. For example, an elderly patient with colon cancer may refuse treatment for fear that it will bankrupt his children. However, he will not be able to foresee that his children, being well brought up by him, will be full of regret and remorse if they were not given the opportunity to provide the best treatment for their elderly father.

What is the best decision? Is there a role for doctors in the family conference to help decide upon the best plan of action for our elderly terminal patients?

Choose to be happy

We often try to read people and it's a skill that is necessary in practice. We often try to see the goodness in people but can we ignore the bad that we may perceive? Who among us will be able to perceive the duality of an individual or perceive his thoughts through his actions? How many of us can tell a person's hidden intent?

We must be optimistic not because everything is going our way but because we can see the good in everything. By doing so, it gives us strength and confidence to face the day-to-day challenges in life, work or relationships.

Do you always find a reason to laugh? Laughter may not add years to our lives but it will add life to our years and make our life more pleasant and enjoyable. Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, but when we cry, we should not do it all alone either.

Every time our patients see us, they expect us to be cheerful and smiling, to be a happy doctor always ready to take care of their medical problems and woes. But we are human too, despite our role of the healer, the counsellor and the comforter.

When things don't work out, don't ask why someone keeps hurting us. We should ask why we keep letting them. Like in any bad relationship, why

do we still hang on and not be willing to leave? What is holding us back and pulling our hearts down?

I see some similarities in our doctors' chat group talking about how bad some third-party administrators (TPAs) are. Why do so many clinics still hold on to TPAs if they are hurting? Is it for the volume and image they bring? Or how busy the clinic looks? Is it like a smelly security blanket that Linus, the comic character in *Peanuts*, carries? Is it to draw the relatives of the TPA patients to visit our clinic? Is it the wishful hope that we will be the last man/clinic standing? Is it that we are oblivious to the financial viability and not business-savvy? Or is it that we think we can still game the system?

There is always a reason to smile, find it.

It may be embarrassing to be in awkward situations. I often find it amusing in certain manner and that makes me smile and laugh. Often I realise too late that the cheerful expression was inappropriate to the feelings of the family of the victim though I bore no ill intention of hurting their feelings.

Value ourselves

True friends are the ones who will lift us up when no one else even notices that we are down. As for the rest, I suspect they may not want to get involved for fear of collateral damage or sacrificing their time to help us instead of seeking material gains.

When we finally retire, our friends, our lives, people will judge us anyway, so there is no need to live our lives trying to impress others. Instead, we should live our lives to impress ourselves. The relationship with our own self sets the tone for every other relationship we have.

At the end of the night before we shut our eyes and sleep, be contented with what we have done and be proud of who we are. Reflect upon what we could have

realistically done better and accept what we could not. Accept our limitations. If we really have done our best, that is enough.

Reflect, be real and lead our lives. ♦

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is also a member of the current National General Practitioner Advisory Panel. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.

