

The Doctor as Manager

Practice management has surfaced as an important term in the vocabulary of the doctor. Suffice to say that it is not enough to know everything about etiology, pathology, clinical features, diagnosis, investigations, and management to be a surviving practitioner. There is a need to know how to make the practice work. The doctor has therefore not only to be good in managing illnesses and patients from the disease point of view, but also be capable in managing the delivery system of care in order that the services available can be channeled to the patients requiring these services in the most efficient and effective way. The latter set of knowledge and skills is practice management and the doctor has to be a manager as well.

In the vision of empowerment of our doctors to practise confidently and effectively, the SMA has embarked on hosting a series of Practice Seminars for

2001-2. The first of these was conducted on 25 March 2001. It had an attendance of 140 doctors.

The theme was "The Doctor as Manager". The plenary lectures were on applications of marketing techniques in medical practice management by a visiting Professor, Associate Professor Terry Beed, and strategic planning for medical practices in Singapore by Dr Prem Kumar. To move from concepts to practice in the empowerment process, there were three workshops: Exploring Strategies for New Medical Practices by Dr Tham Tat Yean; Management Principles to Improve Productivity by Dr Lee Pheng Soon; and Staying Relevant by Dr Philbert Chin.

The take-home messages from that seminar were many. The following are a sprinkling of these messages: marketing information systems are vital to develop improved delivery of medical services; healthcare is undergoing a revolution of attitudes and expectations; an awareness

of the external operating environment is necessary; simple management principles can improve a small practice's revenue by 25-50%; just as you have a strategy to start a practice you also must have a strategy to end it with satisfaction for not only your patients but yourself as well. We are also printing Professor Terry Beed's talk in this issue.

The next seminar will be in September 2001 and the theme will be on IT in healthcare. It will focus on keeping and retrieving medical records. With the palm-tops or PDAs (personal digital assistants) you can literally have timely information in your hands. With some surfing skills, you can open the doors to full-text information and more on the Internet. So keep a look-out for the next empowerment dose for you to practise with confidence. ■

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