



A Bachelor's Tail

(Oops! Sorry hor, I mean 'tale'. I only Sec 4 English ma.)

These are thoughts of a GP, penned after reading the Proposed Establishment of the Family Physician Register, whereby GPs need a post-graduate qualification to be called a 'Family Physician'.

I am a bachelor in all senses of the word: a poor Bachelor of Medicine and a sartorial Bachelor of Surgery; a Jack-of-all-trades and Master of none! Like many of you bachelors out there, I am guilty of increasing the prevalence of chronic diseases through early detection and early treatment as well as sustained lifestyle changes which I had dispensed to my patients. You see, when my patients live longer, they increase the prevalence of chronic diseases. And I am guilty of that! Oh, and bachelors are presumably 'virgins' as well. Virgins because we do not know how to dispense preventive advice. Virgins because in our practice we have never given a single word of advice to our patients to avoid the vices – S.E.X! SMOKING! Non-EXERCISE! XTRIM (diet in short)!

Am I really so green and innocent that after 13 years in private practice and armed with my Bachelor degree, I am still unable to offer simple advice on healthy lifestyle to my patients? Maybe I am over-qualified. I read in the *Today* newspaper on 4 October 2005 that an admirable terminal cancer patient's current project is to prepare for the launch of the Chinese version

of her semi-biographical, self-help book detailing her journey through breast cancer – and this terminal cancer patient has only a PSLE certificate! I feel so ashamed of myself that even with a Bachelor degree, I am not qualified enough to dispense simple advice like 'stop smoking', 'exercise regularly', 'eat wisely', 'sit back and relax', 'screen early', and so on, which form the cornerstone of prevention for most major chronic diseases. Or has the message become so complicated that I now require a Master degree to explain them?

I am a bachelor with a 'family'! My 'family' are my patients. I know the names of the children. I know their parents and grandparents. I remember what illnesses they had suffered even without flipping the cards. It is like an unspoken marriage vow: 'From cradle to grave, till death do us part!' I may be a bachelor but to my patients, I am a part of their family – I am their family physician.

However, being only a bachelor, I have a very meagre income. I cannot afford to feed the whole 'family' sometimes. Times are hard *hor!* Cost of living is rising and with advancement in medicine and technology, newer designer drugs are popping up faster than the babies in our homes. Hey, we are talking about the latest branded medicine like *Brada*, where there are no generic *Brata* at the moment. So what do my poor 'family' members do? Go see the polyclinic or specialist outpatient clinics in public hospitals *lor. Aiyoh!* Can't you see? The solution is so easy. If you want the branded, newer and presumably better and in-vogue medicine, which you need

◀ Page 8 – *A Bachelor's Tail*

to take every day for the rest of your life, then you better get the subsidised *Brada lor*, especially so if you also need *Kucci*, *Chernel*, *Arnani* and *Farahgamo* to stay alive! Imagine also the embarrassment I face when my 'family' members think I am trying to rip them off because even if I should sell them their monthly medication at my cost price, it still costs more than what they pay at the polyclinics or specialised outpatient clinics in public hospitals.

So what should I do now? I would continue to do the same things in my practice. Treat the young, treat the old, treat their parents and their grandchildren. Attend to them when they are acutely ill or injured, counsel them when they are down and feeling blue. Be sympathetic and understanding to them. Smile at them and listen with my heart.

But alas! My name has got to be changed tomorrow unless I upgrade myself. And before my mind gets too old and degenerated with no upgrading, I would like to sound out a warning

to the female non-counterpart of the Bachelor: You better start attending the Proficiency Certificate in Parenthood Course for there is a rumour that the Americans may be implementing this course soon due to increasing prevalence of drugs, violence and casual sex among the young. The next time you would only be known as a BEC (Biological Egg Contributor) and not a MOTHER unless you possess a post-marriage proficiency certificate in parenthood!

I am just going to relish the words of a dead man for dead men tell no lies: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". To my posthumous hero, I say, "A big thank you! You have made my day." ■

A Rose By Any Other Name
 PSLE (S'pore)
 GCE 'O' & 'A' (Cambridge)
 MBBS (S'pore)

