

Challenges & Changes

Dear Editor

As newly elected SMA President Dr Wong Chiang Yin has so eloquently elaborated in his Incoming President's Forum, *Survival and Sacrifice* (SMA News May 2006), there are many challenges ahead of the medical profession and the issues are getting increasingly complex over the years – more so compared to the time when I was in the Council more than 10 years ago (1992-1997; Honorary Secretary 1995-96).

One of the most pressing problems I feel that the incoming Council should address during its term is the imbalance between supply of doctors in the public and private primary healthcare sectors. For the first time, we are seeing foreign-trained doctors from South-Asian countries in polyclinics and hospitals. Where have all our local medical officers gone to? Why is it that in spite of the increase in the intake of medical students, our public hospitals and polyclinics are perpetually understaffed by junior doctors?

In the private sector, we are not seeing a corresponding increase in the number of new GP clinics. The main players are still the big names: Raffles, Shenton, Healthway. Where do the 60% of doctors from each cohort who do not specialise end up? Can the present GP market create sufficient jobs for them? Or is the

situation so bad such that aspiring GPs have to resort to alternative practices like mesotherapy and anti-ageing medicine? Of course people will say that if there is a demand for such aesthetic services, a supply will be generated. Is this the way to go for the future of family medicine?

It does not help either when the Ministry of Health (MOH) adopts a hands-off self-regulatory approach towards this issue of alternative practices. Prior to the licensing of acupuncturists, MOH had adopted a similar self-regulatory stand on acupuncturists and only implemented an accreditation scheme in recent years, citing the reason of increasing popularity and demand for acupuncture services. With increasing affluence and greater demand for aesthetic medical services, should it not be time for MOH to look into the regulatory process for alternative medical practices like mesotherapy?

I hope that the new Council can address these issues head-on with the relevant authorities during its term. It takes time for changes to be made but I believe that SMA has a very capable and dedicated team of Council Members who will strive to work on these issues for the betterment of our profession. ■

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