

The Cell Group

SOCIETY OF RETIRED DOCTORS (SORD)

Friday evening, 8pm.

Members of the cell group affiliated to the SORD were just arriving. Their silver hair, bald patches, wrinkles, age spots, slow and measured gaits, all betrayed their age, but there was something about them an observant bystander might notice. It was not the colourful T-shirts, bermudas or sport shoes they were wearing, but that they seemed to have an aura about them, one of tranquility.

After exchanging the usual pleasantries, they formed a circle with their leader in the centre. They placed their right hands over their left breasts and stood to attention as best as they physically could, and following a signal from the leader, recited this pledge:

**"We, the non-working doctors of Singapore
Pledge ourselves as one united people
Regardless of GPs or specialists
To build a Society of Retired Doctors
Based on mutual respect and camaraderie
So as to achieve
Happiness and health
For our well being."**

The words were spoken solemnly by the participants, and were it not for their portly figures and benign expressions, the proceeding could well be mistaken to be an initiation ceremony of an underground terrorist group, a religious cult or a secret society.



THREE MYTHS OF RETIREMENT

Dr Adam, who was the cell group leader, began the session with the Reaffirmation. "Fellow cell members, welcome to the meeting. As usual we will begin with the Reaffirmation of our Faith in Retirement, or RFR in short. Retirement is a serious and defining milestone in our lives. It is an endeavor and commitment not to be taken lightly. However, the reward, to draw a parallel with Buddhism, is to achieve Enlightenment, not in a religious sense of course, but one of being released from the system which we had locked ourselves in for the greater part of our lives. In a manner, we are born again."

"I wish to remind members too of the three great myths of retirement, perpetuated by those with a hidden agenda. Firstly, it is widely believed that retirement means the beginning of the end, of mind, body and spirit. It is true on one account: it applies to those who, when they decide to retire, are already more or less broken in mind, body and spirit."

"The second myth concerns the use of the adjective "dedicated" to describe the physician. It is not known when the word was first used. Maybe it started with the celebrity doctor Hippocrates, who advocates a doctor to have no other obligations except to his patients. Personally, I think he had done a great disservice to the medical profession by making such a proclamation. Yes, we do owe our patients our time and skill, but not our lives. To the society at large, Hippocrates and his advocates are saintly, but they have committed a blunder, unintentionally perhaps, by enslaving their own colleagues, ethically and morally. My fellow retirees, you have done your part. Do you really believe that your patients cannot survive without you?"

"The third myth is that retirement is boring. It is really sad, especially for doctors who are supposed to be logical and intelligent, to think this way. We have to qualify before we are allowed to practise medicine. So it is with retirement, we have to prepare ourselves first in order to live out our golden years and to enjoy the spectacular sunsets. I wonder how many of our older doctors have read a book on retirement? The quality of life for retirees is not necessary inferior to those who are working full-time, and in many ways, superior. Management is the key."

"We boarded a train many years ago. It was a long journey. The train passed through many places, some beautiful, some ugly, some exhilarating, some tedious. We had gracious companions and irritating ones too, also generous ones who shared their knowledge and experience with us, and selfish ones who made our journey unpleasant. We made good friends, and unfortunately sometimes, we made some enemies. Be as it may, we have reached our destination and it's time to disembark. Our tickets are not open-ended. To carry on the journey means to run the risk of being thrown out of the train, or worse, to be carried out."

"Shakespeare remarked:

'O! that a man might know

The end of this day's business, ere it come

But it sufficeth that the day will end,

And then the end is known."

"Ladies and gentlemen, we must give ourselves a pat on the back for successfully completing the journey. We will use the Shakespearean verse for our RFR tonight. Thank you all, and now our hardworking secretary, Dr Soh Lay See, will take over the conduct of the meeting."

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A RETIREE

"Hi everybody, sorry if I appear a bit out of sorts. I hope it's not due to the creeping senility, but only because of my late nights. It doesn't matter really, because I don't have to report for work in the morning." (Applause from members.)

"I made a new friend recently. For my contribution to our "A Day in the Life of a Retiree" programme, I will relate the story."

"My wife, also retired, and I were wandering around Chinatown one evening. One of the many things we retirees can do is to wander around and on foot preferably. For one, it costs nothing, two, it's good exercise, and three, we get to see things at close range. One advice our society gives to new retirees is to get on your feet, go out of the house and wander around. It isn't as aimless as it seems for the world is full of surprises. If you think a lot can happen within the four walls of your consultation room, just imagine what the outside world can offer."

"We were looking for something to eat. There were several eating shops in the vicinity and we deliberately chose one with no customers at all. Retirees should support and help those in need whenever we can. In a way, it is like practising medicine. It makes one feel good."

"I was intrigued by the banners we saw hanging on the walls inside the shop. They were congratulatory messages to Dr W on the opening of his restaurant. My curiosity was aroused because the proprietor might be a medical doctor. I asked the person who came to serve us, who is this Dr W. "I am," he answered in perfect English. To cut the story short, he was an ex-lecturer at the National Technological University, who had retired and opened this eating shop. He was really friendly, and very soon, we were talking like old friends and I got to know something about his genealogy, work, past and present, likes and dislikes. He even gave me his home address. Communication has to be two-way. I told him I was retrenched voluntarily. He said I had a sense of humour, and from my appearance, I looked "active". I said I was "active" but not in employment."

"Very soon, the dinner took on the mood of a get-together of friends. He sat with us most of the time because there weren't any other customers. The food served was actually quite satisfactory. In the end, a 10% discount was given and the charge for tea was waived. I promised to visit again."

Last night I was with him till late, which accounts for my looking a bit off-coloured. We spent an interesting evening in conversation, covering many topics except medical ones. I told him I had developed an aversion to medical subjects. This is not due to my retirement, but because when I express an opinion, I am often labelled a contrarian, so what is the point? Earlier, he had asked me about the discrepancies in the charges for the different government hospitals. I told him I really do not know the reasons. Doctors, I told him, are probably not responsible. After that, I refused to discuss any more medical matters with him. It is more interesting to hear him talk about his Shantung chefs."

"The point I wish to make, really, is that retired doctors should go out and make friends. There are many interesting people around and they can enrich our lives. The nature of our work and the long hours we kept during our working lives do not encourage much interaction with healthy outsiders, and there is a danger of us becoming very narrow-minded indeed."

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"So much for sharing my experience in "A Day in the Life of a Retiree". I will now distribute a handout the society has prepared for its members. You may find it useful. It is a list of recommended activities for retirees. It is divided into six categories:

1. Activities to promote health and fitness
2. Activities to turn one on
3. Activities (forgotten) that have turned one on in the past
4. Activities that one has always dreamt about
5. Jalan-jalan
6. Makansutra"

"Please contact me if you wish to have more information."

RETIREMENT TRAUMA SYNDROME

"And now, let me introduce our guest speaker for tonight. She is none other than Ms Li Tai Lee, a counsellor specialising in retirement problems. Many retirees, no matter how well they have prepared themselves for retirement, will probably experience to varying extents, the Retirement Trauma Syndrome, or RTS, sometime. Ms Li, an expert on the subject, will speak to us. Ms Li, please."

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's all common sense really, like maintaining good eating and sleeping habits, making it one's business to be cheerful, be curious, be active, holding on to friends, and so on, but above all, don't live in the past..."

"Miss," a member suddenly interrupted. He was the one who had arrived late and seemed not well. He was sweating and his voice was faltering: "I have to leave the group. I am resigning. I am boarding the train again. I am sorry to have let the group down but I am broke. Greed, indulgence and lack of self-discipline, I got myself involved in..."

After the doctor left and the buzz had quietened down, Ms Li Tai Lee continued: "A support group like this is important. The relapse rate is high. The doctor who has just left, at least, has a compelling reason, but the majority who back-slide do so because, and I would like to quote one retired doctor, who said: "The problem is quite clear to me. None of these doctors made any provision while they were in practice to pursue some other hobby or skill. All were "dedicated" doctors. And that's all they were. They had nothing else.""

"Not really," one doctor whispered. "Many of the "dedicated doctors" have three cars, four houses and boxes of precious stones to give to their descendents." ■