

The EDITORS' MUSINGS



Dr Tina Tan

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist in private practice and an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. She treats mental health conditions in all age groups but has a special interest in caring for the elderly. With a love for the written word, she makes time for reading, writing and self-publishing on top of caring for her patients and loved ones.

The topic of retirement is a dicey one, because it reminds us of our "limited shelf life". But it is something for everyone to consider. While it can be argued that not all of us have to "retire" in the traditional sense, we have to be mindful of when it is time to slow down and hand things over to someone younger.

This month's issue is in a way a segue from last month's issue, where we talked about Singapore's ageing population. *SMA News* has decided to focus on doctors and retirement. We won't go into the ethics of what to do if and when our colleagues become impaired for whatever reason (that is a whole different can of worms). Instead, we feature insights from doctors about how to prepare for retirement. Our Feature this month is my interview with Dr Charles Toh who, at 92, is still practising and going strong. I had a delightful chat with him about how life has changed for him as a cardiologist, and what he does to keep himself active. We have also included an article on mental capacity by Miss Goh Eng Cher, which is relevant to all of us as practitioners and as individuals. Enjoy.

Doctors will get old, infirm, and eventually pass away. Yes, we do! In our youthful vigour and busyness, we unconsciously develop an aura of invincibility. But in truth, our physical abilities decline with age; I noticed that about five years ago when I needed new glasses for reading! In the last few years, I could barely read my computer screen properly when wearing a face mask. I really am purpose-built for lazing around. I reckon retirement would be really easy for me – just stop.

However, on deeper reflection, there are several trends that will affect the manner in which doctors retire, and practising doctors going into retirement will need to do more. Besides the usual dichotomy of surgeons and physicians, there are a great variety of jobs such as pathology, radiology, administration and management, research, education, and many others. The retirement journey will be very different for everyone. For starters, doctors are also living longer and healthier. Retirement in the conventional sense may be a disservice to them and to the patients they serve. The development of technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics may mean that doctors could have an extended career lifespan.

On the other hand, doctors may need to retire for many reasons. It is essential to plan our retirement – especially if we have patients – to ensure that our professionalism continues. Some may plan to reduce their practice hours



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instead of completely stopping. Others may want to pursue other activities which they put off due to their duty to patients. Regardless, planning for retirement is a way for us to live the lives we want and yet feel satisfied that we have been professional in handling our affairs as doctors. In this issue, we look at retirement from the perspectives of practising surgeons and physicians. Please write in your opinions for future issues. We would love to hear from you! ♦