



Resuscitating a Genre Stuck in Cardiac Arrest

By Dr Oh Jen Jen

From 2005 to 2007, I wrote a number of articles for *SMA News* about medical TV dramas, including *ER*, *House*, *Nip/Tuck* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Since then, the first three shows have ended their successful runs, while *Grey's* is floundering into its ninth season (I stopped watching after it peaked in season two).

In my opinion, TV audiences can never get enough of three main subjects: doctors, lawyers and detectives. But lately, healthcare workers have been losing out in the ratings. Is this the result of poor writing? Weak storylines? Annoying casts? *Grey's*, *Private Practice*, *Royal Pains* and *A Gifted Man* all suffer from at least two out of three, which is why I haven't watched a medical drama series for quite a while, preferring to spend my progressively dwindling spare time on other far more superior shows.

But this got me thinking: why doesn't someone adapt plots from critically acclaimed or top-rated series into medical settings? Here are my suggestions.

Institute of Mental Horror (aka IMH)

– modelled after *American Horror Story* (AHS)

Set in a mental asylum (similar to AHS's upcoming second season), this dark tale follows a group of doctors and nurses stationed in Ward 666. Refurbished after a mysterious fire that claimed 44 lives, the once peaceful floor now echoes with eerie noises, and the staff can't be sure if certain patients are real or figments of their imagination. Are vengeful spirits attacking vulnerable

victims and trapping their souls for eternity? Dr Ben Han, a newly arrived Psychiatry resident, gets suspicious when he notices the ward getting especially crowded during the Hungry Ghost Festival, and certain patients continue to hang around even after he discharges them. Things get interesting when the Singapore Paranormal Investigators are called in for a consultation...

Needle Stick

– modelled after *True Blood*

Registrar Dr Soo Kee works in the Emergency department. Life is pretty routine until a new colleague, Dr Bill Koh, joins the team. Devastatingly handsome but strangely aloof, he never seems to eat or drink anything, and is in serious need of a tan. One of many foreign talent recruits, he speaks with a lilting Southern American accent, and works night shifts exclusively. Unfair roster schedule aside, Soo Kee's curiosity is piqued when her crucifix pendant accidentally touches Bill's arm during a scuffle with a violent patient, and causes a burn. The wound heals almost instantly and no one else notices, but he beats a hasty retreat and she corners him in the staff pantry. They are alone, and she demands answers, only to realise that Bill doesn't cast any reflection in the nearby wall mirror. Will he reveal his true identity? Will she keep his secret? It would make more sense for him to "glamour" her and get it over and done with, but where's the fun in that? Stay tuned...

The Good Doctor

– modelled after *The Good Wife*

Dr Alicia Fong has been married to her politician husband, Peter, for 20 years. However, their lives are forever altered when Peter is exposed as a client in an underage prostitution ring bust. Disgraced and in financial trouble, the couple and their two teenage offspring are forced to move out of their palatial Sentosa Cove bungalow into a three-room Housing Development Board rental flat. Despite not practising medicine for 15 years, Alicia now has to become the sole breadwinner as Peter faces time in prison. Fortunately, her old friend from medical school, Dr Will Gan, owns a lucrative Aesthetic Medicine franchise and offers her a job. As Alicia nurses emotional wounds and struggles with her marriage, Will's comforting presence draws them closer with each passing day. It doesn't help that she had a massive crush on him in university, and their single kiss at a New Year's Eve party was never adequately addressed. Now Will's inviting her to accompany him on a conference trip to New York. Just the two of them. Should she accept his invitation and fulfil a longtime fantasy, or stand by her beleaguered husband?

Scalpel of Justice

– modelled after *Dexter*

Pathologist Dr Dexter Mok is quiet, hardworking and unassuming. He does his best to solve vicious crimes and put killers behind bars, but sometimes, the smart ones find a way to beat the system. When one such criminal is acquitted and claims another victim the day after his release, Dexter decides that the law cannot offer sufficient protection, and it is up to him to stop these animals before it's too late. Stalking them at their homes and favourite haunts, he subdues them with a strong sedative, then finds a secluded spot to carry out his bloody deeds. Before slitting their throats, he facilitates their admissions of guilt, and inflicts a single wound to the cheek so he can collect a drop of blood to store on a glass slide. Well-versed in the analysis of forensic evidence, he meticulously cleans up after himself so no trail is left behind. The streets are much safer, but officers from the Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) Major Crimes Division are baffled by the unexplained disappearances of key suspects. It also doesn't help that Dexter's sister, Deborah, is a CID Sergeant...

White Coats

– modelled after *Suits*

A day of boring ward rounds gets a boost when general surgeon Dr Harvey Seow meets Mike Ren. Blessed with a photographic memory and high IQ, Mike ran a thriving business taking written exams for medical students overseas, but returned to Singapore when his only surviving relative, his 80-year-old grandmother, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. During a hospital visit, Mike overhears Harvey, a few beds away, sounding frustrated when his medical officer and registrar are stumped by a challenging question. Eager to put an end to their misery, he shouts the correct answer. As the rest of the team moves on to another patient, Harvey comes over to speak to Mike and admits he's impressed. In a moment of candid honesty, Mike explains his situation, and Harvey offers to help him get a job as a medical officer. Don't have a real medical degree? No problem! Someone once impersonated a doctor not too long ago, and got away with it for some time before anybody found out! Not proficient in practical procedures? Why bother when phlebotomists and nurses perform most of them these days?

Offered this exciting opportunity, Mike promises to do whatever it takes to function in his new role. Before long, he overtakes all his peers, wins the Best Medical Officer Award, and sails through the residency interview. But Mike's past catches up with him when a new recruit, Trevor (foreign talent again!) recognises him and threatens to expose the charade. Trevor thinks twice though, when he realises that he, too, is at risk since he paid Mike to take an exam a few years ago. Darn it! Will Trevor reveal everything to Harvey, or will Mike find a way to get rid of the thorn in his side? **SMA**

Notes

1. To "glamour" someone is to charm them into obeying and erasing their memory.
2. All the abovementioned original dramas that served as inspiration are my current favourites, and in case you're wondering, all angmoh first names are used in honour of the original characters. Personally, I consider it a cardinal sin to not watch Dexter. And in my opinion, Suits was robbed of at least three well-deserved Emmy nominations this year. Argh!



Dr Oh Jen Jen is a consultant at the Department of Emergency Medicine, Singapore General Hospital. When not battling endless patient queues at the hospital, she spends way too much time in front of the TV. An avid blogger since 2002, she also hopes to write a screenplay or novel someday – if she manages to survive her three-monthly episodes of job burnout.