

LETTERS

Going the Extra Mile?

I refer to the article “The Unknown Chinese Female” by Warren Ong (*SMA News*, November 2012). The author referred to an elderly demented patient without personal identification, who wanted to make contact with her family. He wanted to make a house visit to determine if contact could be made, but was “discouraged” from doing so by a doctor who deemed it “inappropriate and unprofessional, as a line had to be drawn between my role as a doctor and my desire to go the extra mile”. I certainly hope that this doctor was wrongly quoted.

This is disturbing – the attitude of the doctor and the teaching he was giving to the student (Warren). What is so inappropriate and unprofessional about doing a house visit? All doctors are free to do so, except that some are more inclined than others. Of course, there must be proper justification. A public sector doctor may not go and treat a patient at home, whereas a private doctor often does that. But to make contact with a patient’s family is clearly a good thing. If there are concerns about personal safety, perhaps another person like a friend or colleague may go along.

In the conduct of medical practice, there is no limit to what we can do to “go the extra mile” so long as it is practical, doable and within the limits of our jurisdiction. In fact, all medical students should be encouraged to do more home visits, with proper guidance.

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