



Passion AND Compassion

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

February is here again and both Valentine's Day and the Chinese Valentine's Day fall in the same month this year. Both days are about passion and romance.

In our profession, we too often talk about passion in what we do. When was the last time you looked back and reflected on the reasons why you embarked upon this journey to be a healer? Was it because of your passion for this noble profession? Do you have enough compassion for your fellow human beings? Many of us wanted to be doctors because we care about others. We believed that our passion to study medicine was to fulfil our ambition. When we graduated and became house officers, reality hit us and became a wake-up call for many.

Ideally, we should know our patients inside out. It is a human failing for us to take advantage of them when we know so much about them. We are expected to not develop romantic feelings for our patients or even more so enter into relationships with them. Our calling and passion is the practice

of medicine based on compassion for our patients and their sufferings, not to take advantage of them. Our code of ethics and professionalism continually reminds us of this.

Passion for medicine

What is passion for medicine? Year in and year out, I see many of us toiling long hours in clinics, doing research, conducting home visits or volunteering on overseas mission trips. Personally, I feel good solving the medical problems of my patients, helping them see what their problems actually are and coming up with practical solutions that they can adopt.

Although most of us end up practising clinical medicine, a smaller number gave up clinical medicine and realised their calling after graduation. You may have met medical doctors fulfilling their calling in non-medical or non-clinical fields, like in politics, health administration, clinical and medical management in pharmaceutical companies, banking and manufacturing.

When I speak to the different subsets of our medical fraternity, I am often surprised to see many disillusioned doctors. They now realise that medicine is not how they envisioned it. Some are exhausted from the heavy and demanding workload, actual or perceived, and have lost their joy in what they are doing.

Does embarking on a journey to pursue the study and practice of medicine require such a huge sacrifice that we need to forsake everything else? There are many examples of both extremes but I think it is about what you really want in life and the trade-offs that you are willing to accept. Take for example a friend of mine, who got so tired of the medical scene in Singapore, he emigrated to Canada and worked as a factory worker in an assembly plant. He sells *bak kwa* as a side business. But medicine is still his calling and in his blood. He ended up taking the local medical examinations there and passed it. He is now working as a GP in a Canadian Chinatown and is more matured in the way he handles similar

medical practice issues that he used to face in Singapore. I suppose this is an example of a growing up process faced by a fraternity member.

We have numerous female doctors who are able to strike a balance between serving as a wife and mother, and working as a medical doctor. I am sure they have to make sacrifices but they are able to come to terms with their decisions.

Sustaining our passion

I previously aspired to be a paediatrician and even sat for my MRCP entrance examinations. After passing that, I left the service to join the pharmaceutical sector to gain exposure to the corporate world. After five years of jet setting, I stopped as I dearly missed clinical work. I then worked as a part-time locum, but that did not satisfy my calling as I needed to feel ownership of my patients.

Now, after more than twenty years of running my own private practice and trying out all sorts of schemes run by private entities and the Ministry of Health, and the restructured hospital system that GPs in Singapore get exposed to over the years, I still feel the adrenaline rush

when solving challenging problems for my friends and patients. Will this passion and longing die out in the years to come? Will I end up like those who burn out and no longer find clinical work exciting?

One of the reasons that we end up in this state is that when we were younger, we felt that we should push ourselves hard because we believed that we will become more resilient with time.

Will we regret when we fall and can no longer look after our patients? As doctors, we need to look after ourselves so that we can do our best for our patients. Will patients be forgiving when we slip up due to tight work schedules or insufficient sleep or when we are fatigued? Or will patients prefer that we love ourselves so that we are in better shapes to take care of their medical problems?

We also need to extend collegiality to our fellow brothers and sisters in the profession. We are one big family and yet we are guilty of pointing fingers when things go wrong. We need to inculcate a positive spirit so that we can groom future generations of doctors with the right values and in the right manner. After all, we need to have a

good succession plan so that we can be better taken care of when we grow older and become patients ourselves.

At the end of the day, for some of us, when we hang up our stethoscope and seek what we have been yearning for all along – that is our real passion in life – only then will we be truly happy until we grow old and fade away.

Till death do you part, but for me, I see medicine riding with me as I gradually disappear into the sunset. ♦

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is also a member of the current National General Practitioner Advisory Panel. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.



2019 AGM

Please mark your calendar for SMA's upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM). The details are as follows:

DATE

14 April 2019, Sunday

TIME

2 pm to 4 pm

(Lunch served from 1 pm onwards)

VENUE

2985 Jalan Bukit Merah,
SMF Building, Singapore 159457
(meeting room details to be confirmed)

MAP

<https://goo.gl/maps/K7Wz4QGWU192>

Please send an email to szeyong@sma.org.sg if you wish to:

1. Confirm your attendance (for both the AGM and lunch);
2. Submit resolutions and/or proposed constitution amendments; or
3. Submit nominations to fill the ten vacancies in the SMA Council.

Do also take note of the following sections from SMA's constitution:

Article XI, section 1, sub-section (iii)

Any member desirous of moving any resolution at the Annual General Meeting shall give notice in writing thereof to the Honorary Secretary not less than thirty (30) days before the date of such Meeting.

Article XII, section 2

The proposed amendments to the Constitution and Rules shall be made in writing to the Honorary Secretary at least thirty (30) days before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

Members are invited to submit nominations of candidates to fill the ten vacancies in the Council, in accordance with Article VIII Section 3a of the SMA Constitution.

Nominations must be signed by two Ordinary/Life/Spouse Members and contain a consent to act, if elected, signed by the person nominated.

All completed forms should reach us by 12 noon on 15 March 2019.