



Our Young Men and Women

THE WAY FORWARD

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

Soon it will be Christmas and what have you done?

Our young ones are returning home from overseas schools and universities to spend this festive holiday with their family and friends at home.

Caring for our young

Have they turned out to be what we envisioned and hope for? Are they somewhere they want to be or are they disillusioned and have moved on to another career? Will they still make us proud for being their parents? Despite them giving up on their dreams, we should understand and still love them unconditionally as their parents. Alternatively, have they gone astray, acquired bad and undesirable habits – our worst fears realised since the day we sent them abroad?

When they pass their examinations with flying colours and graduate with laureates and accolades, we will be very proud of them, with a smile so wide that it extends from cheek to cheek.

After the varsity schooling and training, when they enter the job market, they will be facing the real world where deep skills are tested and these are likely to be different skill sets from those tested in their varsity examinations. Will they survive the hard knocks of real life?

What if they have decided to switch career paths halfway and embark on studies of a totally different nature? I feel that we should not be disappointed with them. We should be supportive of their decisions on how they want to fit into this world.

Do we have the responsibility of producing more doctors and propagating our chosen profession? Or should we leave them alone to explore their own world and perhaps only give guidance when they have painted themselves into a corner? Or should we leave them alone to seek their path in their clouded vision?

If they drop out, after feeling confused, and pursue seemingly less challenging lifestyles and work-life balance, they may yet strike their first pot of gold, or they might find their success in unconventional ways.

To me, if they are able to find their own sustained happiness and enrich their own lives and the lives of people they meet, I would surely be very proud of them.

Have your young ones gone astray and plunged into the world of darkness? Have they been led astray by instant gratifications, superficial glory and beauty that the world promises? Some of us might give up on them and sever

our relationship with them. That will be like setting free your sampan without an anchor. However, are you ready to bear the consequences of doing so and live the rest of your life with regret and self-admonition?

We should not give up and should keep trying to bring them into the light again. Some of us may have to face the hard choice between caving in to the wishes of our young ones and maintaining the long term perspective of delayed gratification. Others prefer to set a good role model that our young can look up to, appreciate and emulate when they mature or they become parents.

Family relations

Many medical students come from well-to-do families or have parents who are professionals; there are also many who are from financially challenged households and need to work part-time to pay for their sustenance during their medical school years. The SMA Charity Fund has been providing bursaries and pocket money to alleviate their difficulties.

With the festive season approaching, should we drink, be merry and worry about the consequences later or do we toil hard to clear the deck before the next storm breaks? As leaders of

our profession and society, we need to shoulder heavy burdens by setting a living example, practising the right kind of medicine, giving good guidance to our young, contributing to our society, and being compassionate and caring towards our patients.

In dealing with the various issues, is it all a game or does reality bite? Some of us will just bite the bullet and hope that things will get better, while others will run away and live to fight another day.

How important is your family to you? Do you think that your parents are redundant and are no longer useful for your career development? Have they become a burden to you? Or are your wings fully hardened and you can now challenge your parents' thinking, beliefs and principles that they grew up with and held dearly?

We should see the family like a warm fireplace and your ultimate sanctuary to run to for solace. Our family should be where we can always find comfort. Some of the younglings felt that their parents are so strict and stifling that they would run away from home at the slightest possible opportunity. Some of our young felt that they are being talked down and hence harbour resentment. Would you prefer to be seen to be listening or would you play the role of stern parents?

Moving forward

As doctors, our role in society is often not only seen as a healer but also a leader and role model. Hence, we have to uphold our moral and ethical standards.

So what happens when we fall? Doctors who are found to be guilty of criminal offences may get struck off the register at the Singapore Medical Council. But what about our human failings? Are we judged too harshly when we cannot live up to the standards expected of us?

The doctor's rehabilitation is not over with judgement and punishment after a trial. Our community needs to learn from this experience and institute rehabilitative and preventive measures. Who do we look to and entrust to undertake this huge responsibility of remedial actions and correction for our colleagues who offend?

We should have our own "Three Beyonds".

First, we should move beyond just disciplinary procedures to preventive and rehabilitative measures, through education and learning scenarios to help our community understand what the right moves are moving forward.

Second, we should move beyond being hospital centric to focus on our primary care in the community. Better understanding of policies and advisories

that may seemingly be easily applied in the restructured institutions is needed and will have to be further tweaked to apply to the private healthcare providers.

Third, we should move beyond principles and translate quality to value proposition for doctors in the community. This would ensure successful implementation of policies and healthcare measures.

With the right framework, our young doctors will have a better life ahead of them to allow them to express themselves and achieve greater heights for medicine. ♦

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.

