



The EDITORS' MUSINGS



Dr Tina Tan

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist with the Better Life Psychological Medicine Clinic, and a visiting consultant at the Institute of Mental Health. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

Arthur C Clarke's famous third law states that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from

Medicine is a school of study that greatly values its traditions – and with good reason. Our professional art is rooted in a great humanist tradition that reminds us constantly that we practise medicine for the sake of people and not for science. It's for that reason that we painstakingly pass on the art of history-taking and physical examination, and the importance of good bedside manners; the reason we so frequently intone to younger members of the profession that "the good physician treats the disease, but the great physician treats the patient who has the disease."

At times, this great tradition seems to run counter to the developments of technology. Telemedicine seems to take us away from face-to-face patient interviews, the bedrock upon which the patient-doctor relationship is built. Increasing ease of access to echocardiography, ultrasounds and CT scans have chipped away at the need to refine our examination skills, removing us from that moment of "laying on

magic". This month, we showcase interesting technological advancements in our local medical scene. This is but a snapshot of the efforts to enhance patient care through the use of technology. While perhaps nothing magical in and of itself, the applications of new and available technologies certainly can make the patients' (and doctors') experience magical.

The elephant in the room remains the ongoing dialogue between the medical profession, insurers and their consumers. A few months ago, SMA conducted a survey among private specialists on Integrated Shield Plans

of hands" when our physical touch not only diagnoses, but also transmits human warmth and empathy. Artificial intelligence (AI)-guided patient-fall monitoring reduces the manpower needed, but it also means that there are fewer staff in the ward when all the patient wants is to talk away their pre-procedural anxiety.

In our giddy euphoria to apply evermore complex and wondrous technology, it's worth remembering that these are all but tools which can be equally used for good and ill. Just as fire in the hands of primordial man allowed us to grasp at some semblance of a better life for posterity, medical technology can better the lives of our fellow men, or bring them great misery. This is as much a time to wonder of ceaseless limitations, as it is of inward introspection into our intentions and methods.

The late Stephen Hawking warned that the development of AI might be the "worst event in our civilisation". As our tools get sharper, we need

(IPs). We have published the results, along with a write up by SMA 1st Vice-President Dr Ng Chee Kwan in this issue (see page 22). Those surveyed encountered various obstacles pertaining to remuneration and the prickly issue of panels. Of course, one might argue that we have only surveyed a segment of specialists, and we probably got the results we were looking for based on the questions we asked. The data speaks for itself. SMA looks forward to continued discussion with the relevant parties and authorities to ensure that healthcare costs do not spiral, nor that patient care is compromised.

Dr Alex Wong

Guest Editor

Dr Wong is a private practitioner who talks too much. This occasionally leads him to write strange things, eat strange foods, travel to strange places and attend strange weddings/funerals that he doesn't necessarily always want to be at. He thinks this is fun and what life should be about.

to be mindful of how the double-edged blade cuts. Yet among the dire warnings of doom and gloom, the great man himself paints a spark of light:

"I am an optimist and I believe that we can create AI for the good of the world. That it can work in harmony with us. We simply need to be aware of the dangers, identify them, employ the best possible practice and management, and prepare for its consequences well in advance." – Stephen Hawking ◆