

Is the Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine Relevant in an Age of Specialisation?

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This 32nd annual Singapore-Malaysia Congress (SMC) of Medicine continued the traditional medical link of the two Academies of Medicine of Singapore and Malaysia, with venues alternating between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. It has survived in an age of increasing levels of subspecialisation.

Many have questioned and some doubt raised on the relevance and viability of this traditional combined congress because of the multidisciplinary nature of the scientific programme. The latter is intentionally inclusive of all medical specialties, ranging from medicine to surgery, from pathology to dentistry, in short, all the major specialties and subspecialties recognised by the Academy of Medicine, Singapore and the Singapore Ministry of Health. The debate for and against the continuation of such a meeting is renewed annually. The *raison d'être* of the congress lies in the twin aims of the perpetuation of medical links and interchange across the Causeway and the need to make a conscious effort to remind physicians and surgeons of the interdisciplinary value of medicine in an age of superspecialisation.

The mission of the Academy is defined by the five objectives of education, training, assessment, audit, research and international medicine. In the field of international medicine, the Academy had played a pivotal and leadership role in the establishment of joint postgraduate examinations, winning international recognition for the medical profession.

The combined SMC provides the annual forum for the meeting of the two Academies. Over the years the original aim of fostering medical links and interchange between the two Academies has not been fully developed. The SMC can provide a forum for and foster a greater interchange of ideas on a whole range of issues that are central to the role of a professional body like the Academy of Medicine. Issues such as the debate on the ethics of medical practice, professional guidelines, problems of changing styles of practice, issues in training, and priorities in health care could benefit from an input of neighbouring views. No doubt there will be minor or perhaps even major differences of opinion between the two Academies based on regional priorities, constraints or idiosyncrasies, but it is only by exploring differences and similarities that important issues could be well thought through and developed. The spin-off of this process is a better understanding of the common and unique situations of the two Academies and the professionals they each represent.

The SMC has done better in the second aim of fostering a holistic approach in medicine by stalwartly maintaining the multidisciplinary nature of the congress. The 32nd SMC was unique in that for the first time, it incorporated the annual scientific meetings of the six Chapters of the Academy of Medicine, namely the Chapters of Physicians, Surgeons, Anaesthetists, Community and Occupational Physicians, Dental Surgeons and Pathologists. The scientific programme was designed to reflect “an integrated approach towards medicine”.

The collection of papers in this issue of the *Annals of the Academy* is not meant to be fully inclusive. Rather, it provides the reader with a sample of the presentations that took place at the congress. The contents of this issue include three main categories: the Named Lectures, Forum for Update and Original Papers.

The Gordon Arthur Ransome Lecture, given by the Honorable Mrs Anson Chan, Chief Secretary for Administration of Hong Kong, SAR, China, and titled “Continuity and Change”, dealt with a topical, high impact, geopolitical issue namely, that of the effect of a change of politics on the social and civil services of Hong Kong. This lecture is well worth a read. The other named lecture, the Runme Shaw Memorial Lecture, “Somatic Evolution of Cancer”, illustrates the basic mechanisms of a process that cuts across all disciplines of medicine. Insightful perspective is derived from “The Orthopaedic Surgeon-Historical Perspective, Ethical Consideration and the Future” and “Gene Therapy-Fantasy or Foresight?”. Scientific update on subjects such as “New Antithrombotic Agents”, “Hepatic Resection”, “Controversies in Anaesthesia - Designer Drugs” to name a few, form good CME material. Useful and new local and regional data on asthma, infection, geriatric and community medicine are found in the Original Articles section.

We hope this collection of papers would further reinforce the existence and continuation of a fine and regionally distinctive medical tradition.

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