

Address by the Master, Academy of Medicine, Singapore at the 1997 Annual Induction Dinner

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Friends, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Council, let me welcome you to this evening's Comitia Dinner in conjunction with the induction of new fellows into the fold of the Academy. Even as we rejoice with our new Academician's entry into the fellowship of the Academy, we must remind ourselves of the special role and responsibilities we assume. As learned men and women of Medicine, society looked upon us as leaders with the highest moral and ethical standards and we must live up to these expectations.

The sick and the infirm place his or her faith in their physicians and we must never betray that faith even though we know that often, there is not much that we can do to halt the progression of diseases, especially the terminally ill. To provide comfort and solace to those in the twilight of their illnesses must remain one of our greatest aims and objectives.

Recent adverse publicity on the medical profession must not deter us in our duties but must motivate us to overcome these setbacks. This is aptly put by Dr William Mayo, one of the founding fathers of the famous Mayo Clinic: "The glory of Medicine is that it is constantly moving forward, that there is always more to learn. The ills of today do not cloud the horizon of tomorrow, but act as a spur to greater efforts."

The practice of Medicine has changed dramatically over the past two decades. This has brought about many issues facing the medical profession today. Rapid technological advances have made the practice of Medicine more complex. New grounds and barriers are broken everyday and the frontiers of medical science expanding unceasingly. While these have benefited the patient, they also inevitably drive up the cost of healthcare.

Information technology, especially through the Internet, meant also that the public and patients are better informed and consequently has higher expectations. Sometimes these expectations are either unrealistic or unreasonable, often leading to patient-doctor conflicts. This may lead to costly and unnecessary medico-legal problems. Learning to manage such expectations must remain an important part of the doctors' professional training. Do it well and you will avoid many unpleasant and expensive experiences you can do without.

The biggest bugbear of any healthcare system is its escalating costs. Many countries, faced with this problem, have resorted to measures that, while holding back costs, are detrimental to the system in the long run. In the US, with a spending on healthcare of 14% of the GDP, managed care was introduced in an attempt to rein in cost but this has resulted a whole host of other problems.

We have to be careful and not repeat such mistakes. As professionals, we can play our part by being more prudent and judicious with the use of expensive high-tech equipment and drugs, adopting modern management systems, including evidence-based medical practice and management protocol based on proven outcome studies. In short, we have to be accountable for what we do.

It will be foolish for us in the profession to disregard these new challenges and hold steadfastly to our old ways of practice. To do so will only relegate us into irrelevance.

While we must move with the Winds of Change, at the same time, we must also hold onto the very ideals and principles that have brought us through the portals of medical school and the Academy. Only then can we claim that we have practice Medicine both as a Science and an Art.

Thank you.

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