

## Dermatology, General Practice and Continuous Learning

Indeed, I feel very honored to be given the opportunity to contribute an editorial for such a prestigious yet familiar journal. This journal has become one of the most frequently read journals in our library. There are many reasons for this.

Dermatological conditions are very common problems in general practice. There are no recent morbidity surveys published for primary care in Hong Kong. However, reports on surveillance surveys in the government outpatient clinics repeatedly listed dermatological problems as the second most common **acute** condition encountered, after respiratory problems. If we take **chronic** conditions into consideration as well, dermatological problems present as the fourth most common problem seen in the government outpatient clinics (averaging 5.5% of total consultations) after respiratory problems, hypertension and diabetes mellitus. The referral rate to specialized dermatological clinics and Accident & Emergency department ranked relatively low (about the eighth, averaging about 6% of dermatological problems and 0.4% of all consultations), sharing similar proportions with musculoskeletal problems.

Knowing this background, it is no surprise to realise that surveys on learning needs for government outpatient clinic colleagues revealed continued and sustained heavy demand for dermatological topics. This learning need is also shared by many private general practitioners (personal communication, yet to publish data).

As far as learning is concerned, some colleagues would not stop at forming small discussion groups, attending seminars and workshops, going to lunchtime lectures, reading journals, visiting internet sites or attending clinical attachments. A few have enrolled into structured distant learning courses in dermatological problems or sitting for overseas diploma examinations. These colleagues do not regard themselves as hybrid specialists. They prefer to remain as frontline general practitioners with their intellectual challenges in dermatological issues satisfied to a certain degree.

Yet, would learning or obtaining an additional certification translate into **better care** for our clients? Are we performing anything differently **before** our new learning and **afterwards**? Such evaluations or stocktaking studies are very seldom made public if done at all.

Normally we are already satisfied with our efforts. Comparing to world standards, we constantly work long hours. It is with great personal discipline and denial that we make use of the little time that is left for our own continued enlightenment. We delete our old learning to make room for the new, thinking that the old thing is out-dated. We often even remove old equipment to make room for the new and fashionable one. Yet, in our haste, have we examined the available evidence critically enough?

It is the responsibility of authors to produce material that is stimulating and original. It is their responsibility to be honest in their sharing of such knowledge or research findings. It is the responsibility of the readers to critically digest the material presented, evaluate its relevance, and incorporate what is learned in one's daily practice. Our clients will in turn, by their attendance and various feedback channels, tell us whether we have offered the expected level of services.

It is the responsibility of the widely read journals such as Hong Kong Dermatology & Venereology Bulletin to continue the celebrated tradition to disseminate knowledge and educate our colleagues in the best available way forward.

May I congratulate your editorial team and all the knowledgeable contributors for a job well done! Our colleagues and I look forward to many a happy learning hours in reading your journal and debating the contents, issue after issue!

**Dr. L. C. Y. Tsang**