

Direction of Dermatology Development in Hong Kong

The development in dermatology has a long and memorable history in Hong Kong. Unfortunately it is a slow and strenuous process due to various difficulties and limitations, despite the effort of our predecessors and the contemporaries. Though the situation is not ideal and sometimes discouraging, the evolution has kept on and in general, faces a brighter future. It is therefore necessary to reconsider our direction of development from time to time during this dynamic process.

One must have noticed that in recent years, the trend of development has focused much on cosmetic dermatology. Aesthetic procedures and cosmetopeutic products have attracted much attention and have been overemphasized by the media and some of our fellow colleagues, such that the balance of development is tilted to one side. The media has promulgated tons of information about these procedures or products through printed materials and electronic means to the laymen. Unfortunately, very often these information are anecdotal, biased, non-evidence-based, and represent preliminary and inconclusive results of certain small-scaled studies. Sadly, these misleading materials are sometimes further endorsed by some colleagues in the media. Perhaps it is time for us to reappraise our role as a dermatologist, who has been struggling through years of training to be accredited as a specialist and establish a status in medicine. Should we pay more attention and allocate more resources to the care of the chronic debilitating skin diseases? Should we allow our status and image to transform to nothing more than that of a beautician?

The next problem worth mentioning is the sub-specialization in dermatology in our locality. Due to the limited resources allocated to the dermatology, sub-specialization is still far from optimal. Most of our predecessors and current colleagues work as general dermatologists. However, it appears that there are some light in the tunnel, as more young and energetic fellows do focus and concentrate their interests on certain individual or group of skin diseases. It is hoped that more devoted and committed scholars or clinicians can perform high-quality researches on focused dermatological diseases, thus form the force to accelerate the sub-specialization in dermatology. In the world of advance medicine, sub-specialization is an irresistible trend in any specialty which wants to survive and produce real specialists.

For centuries in the modern age, the mainstream of dermatology is from western countries, where most of the development or researches originated. The information in the renowned dermatological textbooks is thus mainly collected from the western populations. Could the eastern countries also play a part, or at least contribute to oriental dermatology reflecting its unique features? Hong Kong, with the majority of its population being Chinese, can provide a platform for studying the epidemiology and unique features of oriental skin diseases. Furthermore, traditional Chinese medicine has, for the first time in the history of Hong Kong, received real attention from the government and universities. This would be a golden opportunity for collaboration between local dermatologists and Chinese medicine practitioners to contribute in the development of topical or systemic treatments of skin diseases. Could more prospective well-controlled studies be carried out between different institutes?

Apart from the above-mentioned problems, the local dermatologists are imminently facing challenging changes in the health system that may have great impact on the development in this field. We are now standing at the cross road of health reform which will involve the restructuring of the health care system and reallocation of resources. Would the future development in dermatology lie on the Hospital Authority, Department of Health or the two medical schools? What will be the future relationships among dermatology, venereology and internal medicine? What will be the future interface between private and public sectors in this specialty? All these remain uncertain and puzzle local dermatologists and their trainees. It is therefore the critical time for us to have cogitative rumination, meticulous planning, and persevering implementation of our decision for our future.

Finally, before I step down from the Chief-editorship that lasted for the past five years, I want to express my best wishes to my successor and the new editorial board. I am sure that they will lead our bulletin to a wide boulevard and a bright future.

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