

Editorial

What do you see?

Dr Jeffrey Callen and June Robinson raised the question "What is medical dermatology?" in the editorial of the July 2005 issue of the Archives of Dermatology. Do you have the feeling that the local community has been developing an impression that dermatologists are professional consultants who recover admirable remuneration from their aesthetic procedures in recent years? I would like to share with the readers what we have been doing in the public service.

As an internal physician

Apart from seeing patients in the standard out-patient clinics, in-patient consultation is provided by our service in the major public hospitals. We have been recognised as team members in the care of patients with varieties of medical background. There are occasions, not infrequently, wherein our decision will affect the overall management plan of these patients. Examples include: 1) to unveil an underlying systemic disease from its skin manifestations (amyopathic dermatomyositis, occult tuberculosis, aleukaemic leukaemia, etc.); 2) to assess the severity or activity of a disease (graft vs host disease, SLE, etc.); 3) to manage skin diseases that will affect the therapeutic decision and outcome (drug reactions, arthroplasty, etc.); 4) to detect infectious disease clustering or outbreak (scabies outbreak in ward or extended care facilities, atypical mycobacterial infection, MRSA, etc.).

As a public health physician

Apart from delivering drug treatment to patient with STI, we also play an important role with

respect to STI control and prevention via: 1) collecting epidemiological data concerned to STI surveillance; 2) counselling people with STI on safer sex, partner notification; 3) developing public health educational material or projects (or support the concerned non-governmental organisations in these projects or programmes) concerned to STI prevention; 4) formulating guidelines in STI case management; 5) organising CME activities and supporting the local profession in controlling STI within the local community; 6) providing input to funding agencies in financing various projects related to STI/HIV prevention or surveillance, and to the policy makers/advisory committees in programme/policy development. Moreover, as aforementioned, we also play an important role in detection of outbreaks in infectious skin diseases.

As a "procedurist"

In contrast to the traditional internist, dermatologists have been involved in various procedures in their practice. We have been performing skin biopsies, cryotherapy, electro-surgery for years. We are now equipped with laser machines that are permissible for various vascular, pigment or ablative procedures. In recent years, skills in suction skin grafting, botulinum toxin injection, more complicated nail surgeries and even simple skin flapping surgeries are developed by a few members of our team.

As an academician

Given that there is currently no full time academic dermatology staff in medical faculty of both universities, our staff team has been playing an

important role in local studies concerned to skin diseases and STI. To name a few studies that were conducted in the past few years, there were genetic study on Darier's disease in Chinese, clinical and pathological aspects on skin malignancies, quality of life of patients with skin diseases, and various aspects on STI. We have also been delivering basic medical training in dermatology and venereology to the local medical and nursing schools. We have also been developing management guidelines in focused areas in dermatology and venereology.

Then, who are you?

I would like to share with the readers a story about a famous Chinese poet Su Dong Po (蘇東坡) who tried to answer the above question. Su and Monk Fo Yin (佛印和尚) were good friends in the Sung Dynasty. They were the kind of good friends who liked to play tricks on each other. Su was very confident in poetry and in Buddhism. He liked to demonstrate his superiority in knowledge

in Buddhism especially in front of Fo Yin. One day, after *Zen meditating (坐禪) in Jin Shan Monastery (金山寺), Su felt so refreshing and asked Fo Yin, "Look at me, what do you see, Master?". Fo Yin said, "I see the serene image of Buddha. Look at me please, Scholar, what do you see?". Su burst into laughter and said, "A pile of cow dung, ha ha..!". Fo Yin smiled and was very delighted to hearing from Su. Su left smugly home, expressed his joyfulness and told his story to Xiaomei (蘇小妹) that he had once again successfully made a joke on Fo Yin and surmounted him in Zen. Xiaomei said peacefully, "My dear brother, you lost and looked foolish, Fo Yin had Buddha in his heart and therefore he saw Buddha's image on your face while you had dung in yours and therefore saw the same on Fo Yin's face!"

What do you see?

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*Zen that is used loosely in the text, originally refers to Japanese form of Buddhism that emphasises the importance of concentrating the mind more than learning from religious books or preaching [adopted and modified from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary].