

## Editorial

# One enlightening day in the Singapore National Skin Centre

Singapore is, and has been, a challenge to Hong Kong in various fields like the competitiveness of her economy and the handling power of her terminals. In most areas, we are ahead of her. Unfortunately, in the medical field of dermatology, I am less optimistic. This is based on my recent visit to the National Skin Centre of Singapore.

Housed in a five-storey building, the chaste National Skin Centre (NSC) is a consecrated organisation with well-round dermatology facilities. Besides the consultation clinics, it has a phototherapy unit, phototesting unit, iontophoresis unit, skin surgery unit, a day treatment centre and various laboratories dedicated to immunology, histopathology and mycology. The centre has also employed computerised patient record system; patient's data, such as age, previous consultation notes, current medications and clinical photographs, can easily be retrieved on the computer screen anywhere in the centre.

NSC has more than twenty veteran dermatologists running the subsidised and specialised clinics for the local Singaporean and patients from overseas. The local citizens can either be seen as a subsidised case, or, if they are willing to pay more, as private case. Not only can you have a wider choice of time for consultation but also can pick the particular dermatologist you would like to consult. The purpose of the specialised clinics was to see

patients with a special kind of problems, such as hair and nail problems, occupational related skin problems, immunobullous diseases etc. In these clinics, I have a chance to see the use of photodynamic therapy in treating patients with multiple actinic keratoses and the use of diphencyprone topical immunotherapy for patients with extensive alopecia areata. The other important function served by these specialised clinics is for research purpose. Over the years, NSC has published a number of papers on various prestigious dermatology journals based on their own study and research.

On the morning of arrival, I was scheduled to attend the 8 A.M. Journal Club and was able to see how the meeting was conducted. The presented topics focused on recent dermatological development such as the photo-protective activity of polypodium leucotomes extract and the efficacy of Fraxel lasers for skin resurfacing. I was most impressed by the enthusiastic exchanges among the senior dermatologists, which were both enlightening and laudable. As a follow-up, I was arranged to observe how a consultant dermatologist at the Phototherapy Clinic conducted his consultation. The experience was impressive. The consultations went on smoothly in a relaxed atmosphere. Given an allocated consultative quota of 20, this would be self-explanatory. I learnt that clients had to pay for their medication and seldom asked for more than needed.

Back in Hong Kong, my mind was still cogitated on a number of questions. Could our public service be transformed into a semi-subsidised and semi-privatised fashion? Could the patients be charged individually and according to the cost of the medication? Can we be more sub-specialised in our service? Can we dermatologists be given more opportunity and time to perform

research for our local population? I do not know the answers to these questions, but one thing for sure is that we need to boost our effort in this contest before we can catch up with Singapore!

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