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EDITORIAL

Family Physician And The Specialist In Contemporary Medical Practice

With the rapid development and advances in all medical specialties, it is just natural that physicians practising in a particular field develop further and emerge as specialists. These specialists devote time and effort towards in-depth study and research in the spectrum of disease, thus they supercede others in the management of that aspect of pathology.

The role of a family physician in contemporary medical practice is threefold. Firstly, he should care for the general well-being of not only the individual, but also his immediate relatives. A strong doctor-patient relationship should be established to provide both psychological and medical support not only for the patient but also for the family. This greatly facilitates regular follow up visits which are essential in the management of many chronic diseases.

Secondly, there is no doubt that the ultimate aim of therapy is to provide the best possible care for our patients and this could be achieved when the patient is directed to the appropriate specialists. Well-informed patients may be able to identify the optimal doctor and this is ideal. More frequently, however, the patient may not be aware of the exact nature of his disease and also the ability of the individual specialist. If he is left alone to look for the appropriate doctor, then valuable time would be lost in the search and thus early treatment is delayed. The information provided by the family physician is invaluable for the patient in receiving optimal and effective treatment promptly.

To be able to achieve these goals, the traditional 'general practitioner' needs more structured training. Adequate evaluation of our ability is mandatory that the best quality of service is delivered to our patients. The Hong Kong College of Family Physicians is now providing the appropriate training program and opportunities to those intending to pursue a career in Family Medicine.

Thirdly, the family physician should be familiar with the current developments in the different medical specialties so that he can inform his patients accordingly. For example in otorhinolaryngology, hearing restoration is now possible for patients suffering from profound deafness with cochlear implantation. We can manage rhinosinusitis more effectively through operations carried out under endoscopic monitoring. In this way, precise

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dissection is possible and patient's suffering is reduced to a minimum. Major strides have also been made in the field of voice rehabilitation for both benign and malignant diseases. Similar developments in other specialties have also affected the specialists in the individual discipline. All these information sharings could be more effectively provided when the involved specialties hold regular conjoint scientific meetings with the College of Family Physicians. In this way, information on developments in various fields of medicine can be dissipated and finally all the benefits will be transferred to our patients.

In present day medical practice, close collaboration between the family physician and the specialist is essential for delivery of the best medical care.

"The gums best understand the teeth's affairs and together they function". ■

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