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own standard of practice, it implies Family Physicians are a different category of doctors from untrained GPs. We have no power to enforce nor discipline GPs in Hong Kong in learning or practising Family Medicine, however, we do have the mechanism to encourage the provision of high standard family practice. The intention of our College is to promote and further improve Family Practice skills among our members. In actual fact, we are selecting those GPs who are willing to learn. Changing our College name to "Hong Kong College of Family Physicians" gives specificity to our status and more in line with the objective of the College.

Furthermore, it is also an upcoming international trend for various Colleges of WONCA to move towards using the term Family Physicians. In Asia, Singapore and Malaysia

recently changed their College names to Colleges of Family Physicians, so did Taiwan, Korea and Japan. It is about time that we consider whether this change is appropriate for Hong Kong. It will also be less confusing for the public and other specialty colleagues when Family Medicine is being mentioned in the media. With the passage of time, our patients change, the health care system changes, so do our practices, and we should be heading the evolution of medicine to meet the future by the year 2000. ■

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Family Physician

Should We Have A New Name For Our College?*

In the Oxford Dictionary, a "name" is a word by which a person, animal, place, thing, etc is known and spoken to or of. Therefore, the name of a professional organization should represent the identity of her members.

When the Hong Kong College of General Practitioners was established almost twenty years ago, general practice (全科) was chosen as the term to describe and represent the major work of her members. It might have been the most appropriate term at the time. However, things have changed a lot since. Perhaps it is now an appropriate time to critically look at this issue again.

For many years, our College has been promoting our discipline as family medicine (家庭醫科) to the members of the public at large. She has been regularly describing her members as family doctors (家庭醫生) rather than general practitioners (全科醫生). In most of her recent publications, the term "family doctors" is used, instead of general practitioners. This has developed probably because of the fact that "family doctor" has indeed become a commonly used Chinese term in the local language while general practitioner has not.

The term family medicine also signifies the fact that we practise a particular discipline of medicine, which is different from the other specialties. We are no doubt generalists, however, we certainly have our own unique characteristics. We provide community-based personal health care that is primary, continuous and comprehensive.¹ We also tend to cater for most, if not all, members of the patients' families. We frequently make use of our personal knowledge of other family members to help us with our patient care. We also involve other family members with patient care when appropriate.

Although "family medicine" may appear to bias against those few individuals who do not live in family settings, the basic principles of primary, continuous, comprehensive, whole person health care can be applied to all of our patients.

It is now well recognized that the aim of undergraduate medical training is to produce undifferentiated medical graduates who are equipped to undertake postgraduate vocational training, including family medicine/general practice.²⁻³ These fresh graduates are not competent in family

* The views expressed are the author's and not necessarily those of the Journal.

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medicine/general practice. However, the fact that our medical graduates receive their MBBs or MBChBs (内外全科) from their universities upon graduation may make it difficult for some members of the public to recognise this fact. It is also difficult for some other people to recognize that the Fellowship of the Hong Kong College of General Practitioners (FHKCGP, 香港全科醫學院院士) is in fact a postgraduate qualification.

The establishment of Hong Kong Academy of Medicine has further confirmed the use of the term "family medicine" to represent our discipline as our College nominates her members to be Fellows of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (Family Medicine).

At the international level, we have also seen our major organization WONCA (World Organization of National Colleges and Academies and Academic Association of General Practitioners/Family Physicians) adopting a more representative title of World Organization of Family Doctors.

How about ourselves? How often do we call ourselves family doctors instead of general practitioners?

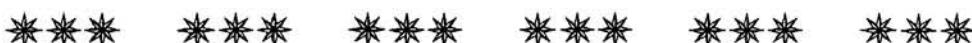
How about our patients? Do they know us as their family doctors or their general practitioners?

There is no doubt that the world is changing and is changing fast. Hong Kong is certainly in a period of rapid change. I wrote in this Journal over three years ago on this issue of name change of our College.⁴ At that time, I had felt the main concern was the Chinese name of our College. However, there is now a proposal to change both the Chinese and English names of our College. The decision to change will be determined by the opinions of our members. 1996 is a good time for us to reconsider this important issue. An open forum will be held at 9:00 p.m. on June 11, 1996 at The Hong Kong Medical Association. I call on our members to participate in this important forum in order to express their viewpoints on this issue which is of crucial long term importance for our College and our discipline. ■

Lam Tai Pong
Editor

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