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Patients remember

by Dr See Toh Kwok Yee, MCFP(S), Editor

With Christmas and New Year just around the corner, it is that time of the year for giving and receiving gifts.

While doctors are generally not expected to be playing Santa to our patients, but on the other hand, we do have our fair shares of greeting cards and pastries of the season from them.

The presents may not be opulent but they all represent a singular thought: appreciation.

Sometimes, I do feel embarrassed by my patients' thoughtfulness. After all, I have regularly made them wait more than an hour, chided them for not following advice and do charge them a standard private consultation fee.

A simple thank-you note would have sufficed.

Recently, an elderly patient whom a GP colleague had managed for more than a decade for multiple co-morbidities was admitted for hepatoma. She had enjoyed good health until recent years when her memory started to fail as result of Alzheimer's.

According to the patient's daughter, even when she had become disorientated during her admission, she had kept talking about her Family doctor by name.

Why do patients remember us?

I believe it's probably because we have done more than the mere ticking off the history checklist and doing a perfunctory clinical examination or embarking on a whole range of investigations.

Experts think it has to do with making that special doctor-patient connection through genuine dedication and actively cultivating a relationship of trust.

This is not about "hospitality medicine", winning over patients with a great personality and a nice smile and nothing else.

It is about the art of engaging patient to trust us enough before applying the science of medicine for a better outcome.

Sometimes, in our anxiety to impress our patients, we do it the wrong way around by diving straightaway into the latest evidence based medicine, which, instead, may repulse them.

In the combat against any disease, we need first to have the patients stand on our side as allies sharing common objectives and targeting the same enemy.

Even more unhelpful is mass arming of patients without any information on where to shoot as seen in some health screening programs that have absolutely no personal doctor-patient encounter from start to finish.

It is, therefore, gratifying to report in this year-end issue that the important role of the Family Physician is once again affirmed and our next generation of colleagues including our medical students are all raring to go!

Here's wishing our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

■ CM