

Affordable Hair Care

What I Learn About Medicine From My Hairstylist

by A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock, President, 24th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Yes, I am exaggerating. I don't have a hairstylist. This is probably quite obvious if you have seen my hairstyle. When I kept it long, some thought I was a Rip Van Winkle who woke up from the 1970s and forgot to update my hairstyle. One day, I decided to finally do something about my hair to make me look more contemporary and more like a corporate yes man. That's when I upgraded myself from affordable basic hair care to specialist hair care.

Contrary to popular belief, having long hair is much cheaper and more convenient. The real reason why I kept my hair long was to save time and money. I cut my hair once in three months. That translates to a 66% savings compared to the average person who have a haircut once a month. On top of that, I go to my favorite primary hair care provider who gives me a decent haircut for just 12 bucks. The instructions are simple and left little margin for error: "Keep long, just trim". Just four words is enough to get the shears moving. I am in and out of the barbershop in 10 minutes and there is no long queue to see your appointed hair stylist. My favorite part is when my head gets a free vacuum cleaning at the end. Every bit of cut hair and I suspect every flake of dandruff is removed from my scalp. I don't even have to get my hair wet! No down time for hair drying.

My woes started when I went for specialist hair care. The price tripled even when I chose the cheapest specialists in town. The hair go out of shape so fast that I have to visit every month. So my head is practically useless for hours on end as they fuss over my hair. What really gets me is the professionalism of the hairstylist. They all look spiffy and professional-like. The ambience is nice. I even get the latest magazines to read and nice cup of tea. What made me most uncomfortable is that they don't seem to be interested in giving me a haircut.

At my latest visit, the hairstylist referred me to a sub-specialist in scalp treatment.

He was really pushy and I relented. I got a free diagnostic test with apparently no obligations. The test involved a dermatoscope examination of my scalp. Even with my training in dermatology the results were really scary. The hairs looked like black steel columns erupting from the earth. Flakes of dandruff looked like huge concrete slabs strewn haphazardly in an earthquake zone. Dormant hair follicles were gleefully brought to my attention. Keratin bits at the root of my hair were pointed out to me. The diagnosis was scary. I have a terminal case of balding. What followed was a discourse on the latest pseudoscience of balding. My hair follicles are plugging up with skin debris. Hair follicles are forced into early retirement. And of course all is not lost despite the very grim situation that I am in. There is a cure. Surprise, surprise. I am in dire need of treatment. Not just one but a series of scalp treatment that comes in an attractive promotional package. My haircut will be on the house if I sign up for this special package today. Notwithstanding my high level of medical training, they managed to raise my anxiety level almost to the point of signing the consent form. Fortunately my natural skeptical nature got the better of my anxiety.

It was like trying to shake off a scotch tape stuck to the sole of your shoes but eventually I did manage to communicate my acceptance of terminal baldness and I was allowed to proceed for my haircut. By which time I was a bit worried that the hairstylist might hold it against me and decide to sabotage my hair. Fortunately he was not so unprofessional. They must have introduced a module on trichological ethics in the school of hairstyling. However, that did not stop the subspecialist from placing a bottle of special treatment lotion in front of me for my consideration. It apparently can do deep cleansing of my hair follicles and resuscitate them to life. I was half convinced to purchase it on the off chance that their diagnosis might be correct and to salvage my relationship with my hairstylist who was holding sharp instruments over my head. That was until I

took a quick look at the ingredients of the lotion. It was written in scientific jargon but with my quasi scientific training, I was able to decipher them. Garden variety stuff that you can get from the shampoo and lotions section of any supermarket. I just couldn't stand being taken for a ride. I refused to budge.

Throughout the hair cut, I can see that the hairstylist was quite distracted. He was constantly trying to steer the conversation back to scalp care. Half way through he found the chink in my armor which gave him the excuse to offer me a free sample of the scalp treatment. Out came the sophisticated contraption with what looked like a plastic spoon at the business end.

"You will be impressed by how effective this machine is. Just wait till you see how much debris it removes from your follicles at the end." He confidently pointed to the spotless black barber sheet that he had wrapped around me. Clearly he wanted me to make a note of the baseline state of the impending before-after experiment. Thereupon he started applying the plastic spoon all over the scalp. It seems to deliver a series of short piezo electric vibrations to my scalp. Fifteen minutes later, we looked at the black cloth that was supposed to have collected a snow storm of skin debris. There was only one strand of good hair that he managed to dislodge from my fast disappearing hair follicles. There was one or two flakes of dandruff. I was justifiably unimpressed and he finally gave up on pushing for a sale. He finished the haircut in silence. Unbeknownst to him, I had gone swimming in the morning and had a good shampoo after that. Otherwise I would probably end up like any other chum and gladly paid up. Unfortunately, I did not get off scot-free. The hair cut was badly done. I am sure he had the skill but his heart was not in. One week later, I return to my favorite cut-and-vacuum shop to trim off the uneven bits of my badly mown hair.

I think there is a lot of similarity between hair care and health care. The other day when I was at a wedding dinner, a

relative came up to me and asked for the recommendation for a specialist. She was uncomfortable with her current specialist in private practice.

"He is very good and very nice. Every time I go it was expensive. It is OK because he is a specialist but he is always asking me to buy all sort of health supplement which is more expensive than his medicine. I really don't want it but it is very hard to say no and he is so nice. Recently he asked me to buy skin care and hair care products. I don't even have a skin problem. Are doctors supposed to do that?"

I did not know what to say.

I have since returned to my primary hair care practitioner. I was pleasantly surprised that they are very good with short hair as well. I don't think they had very fanciful specialist training. However they are all very excellently trained in giving the customer a good hair cut in the context of the shape of his head as well as his idea, concern and expectation of what is good hairstyle. They focus on giving me a high quality hair cut at an affordable price. They just want to earn an honest \$12 from me

and not try to squeeze the last dollar out of my wallet every time I show up. Most important of all they treat me as a person and appreciate my little contribution to their business. Every time I leave, all the hairstylist will smile and bade me farewell. That is just so nice and professional.

■ CM

Dr Lam Pin Min, Minister of State for Health Courtesy Visit to the College

by Dr Vasanwala Farhad Fakhruddin, Council Member, College of Family Physicians Singapore



(Above left) His increasing involvement in the Primary Health Care Scene prompted Minister of State for Health, Dr Lam Pin Min (second from right) to pay a courtesy visit to the College of Family Physicians Singapore. (Right) Dr Lam pens his message in the guestbook.

Dr Lam Pin Min, an accomplished ophthalmologist and Minister of State for Health paid a courtesy visit to the College of Family Physicians (CFPS) on the 20th of May 2015 as part of the Minister's familiarisation of the role that the College plays in enhancing Family Medicine. Dr Lam was previously the Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health prior to his appointment as the Minister of State for Health last year. Dr Lam has been increasingly involved over

the past one year in the Primary Health Care Scene since his appointment, looking after the Primary Health Care needs of the country.

The Minister was briefed on the diverse fields the College Council members were involved in the role of the health care from the family physicians practicing in the heartlands, to the doctors working in the Polyclinics, Nursing Homes, Community Hospitals and Restructured Hospitals. He acknowledged that the diverse

representation of the council members provides a rich repository of collective knowledge. This could be leveraged upon by the Ministry of Health to tackle the challenges faced with regards to the healthcare scene in Singapore.

He was then given a brief introduction of the College by CFPS President, A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock. A/Prof Lee also gave a brief presentation on overcoming the numerous

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