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The Essence of Family Medicine

Dr. Edmond CH Chan

Editor



Dr. Edmond CH Chan

In Hong Kong, the widespread perception of doctor-shopping behaviour prevails. This is not only harmful to the health-care system, as it places burden on hospitals and unavoidably pushes up medical costs, but also to the patients because of a lack of continuity of care. The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, York Chow, has declared that as his vision in promoting family medicine. The health minister has said that while family medicine is a foundation of primary care in the West, it needs to be better developed in Hong Kong.

The essence of family medicine is the continuity of holistic approach to physical and mental care and the patient-doctor relationship. Without having a regular doctor, it is difficult to establish long-term patient-doctor relations. Great emphasis should be placed on commitment to patient, following through their work, social, family context rather than just treating specific diseases. Furthermore, every contact with patients is an opportunity for health education and anticipatory care. Doctors practising in family medicine are gatekeepers to the health delivery system. Patients often come to us with an unorganised, undifferentiated problem. We are the one who stands at the gate on the way to a number of paths and direct them accordingly, meaning the decisions about the use of diagnostic investigations, use of treatments, medications, making proper referrals to specialists etc.

Lastly, I would like to quote a tip¹ from Prof. Michael Kidd, Head of Department of General Practice, The University of Sydney and President of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

How do I know when I've had a good day in my family practice?

- ▶ There's been at least one person in my waiting room
- ▶ I've made at least one person cry
- ▶ I've had at least one person tell me the real reason why they have come to see me
- ▶ I've learned something new about human existence
- ▶ I've increased my medical knowledge

1. Speech made in the Fellowship Conferment Ceremony of The Hong Kong College of Family Physicians on April 18, 2004

