

Presidential Address

Dr John Chew Chee Ming
President
Malaysian Medical Association



Dr John Chew delivering his Presidential Address on 27 May 2016 at the 56th AGM, Miri

Selamat Hari Kaamatan and Hari Gawai,

I am very humbled and feel very honoured to stand here to deliver the Malaysian Medical Association Presidential Address tonight. It is a great honour indeed and thank you all for your gracious presence. A special thanks to our Tuan Yang Terutama. Also, sincere thanks for your presence our Deputy Minister of Health Datuk Dr Hilmi, and, Minister in charge of Health in Sarawak, Datuk Dr Jerip Jusil.

I am indeed very honoured by the presence of so many Past Presidents of MMA, especially the first and second Presidents from Sarawak. Datuk Dr Sengupta and Datuk Dr Chew Peng Hong.

We are delighted that Miri is chosen to be the AGM venue for this year. This is one AGM for all the other towns and cities in Malaysia which aspire to be like Miri. The medical community here in Miri is to be commended for the valiant task in hosting our MMA. You have to agree with me that they have done an excellent job.

I would also like to thank the Immediate Past President Dr Ashok for his able leadership. It has been a pleasure working alongside him together with the Exco.

The Miri community has also come around to support our AGM. I would like to record MMA sincere appreciation to Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan and Datuk Lorna for hosting the Informal Fellowship Night and the Spouse Kelabit lunch. Datuk Lorna is the patron of Sarawak Children's Cancer Society. When we approached Tan Sri Ling Chiong Hoe of Shin Yang for support, he was very quick in responding saying "it is never wrong to have doctors as friends".

To Datuk Law Siu Wai, a special thank you for the wonderful facility here at Meritz hotel.

We must get our young people together to rethink, remould, reshape, re-programme a new set of values

It was Thomas Jefferson in 1809 who said "The only legitimate objective of Government is to promote the Care of Human Life and Happiness and not their destruction. This is the first and only legitimate object of good government". This was the Age of Enlightenment when virtues of freedom, reason, and dogma like "the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers" (Rev Francis Hutcheson 1694-1746) was expounded. With this in mind, MMA has endeavoured to work with our government to improve the Care and Happiness of our people. MMA would like to be the enabler and facilitator, working hand in hand with our Government.

Many families I know are coping with the ravages of old age and cancer.

When you are old, you suffer from a multitude of problems, poor eye sight, impaired hearing, unsteadiness, falls, poor memory etc, leading to solitude, depression and insomnia. Our elderly care services are grossly inadequate. We need to streamline all legislations to get the facilities approved quickly. The urgency is there as we face our demographic cliff of an aging population. We should reward Community Care centres for keeping old people out of hospitals. In this respect our primary care doctors, our General Practitioners colleagues, must lead this charge. I repeat, our General Practitioners must be the back bone of our health care.

SCHOMOS has been asking for time based increment for specialist allowance, subspecialty allowance and revision of medical report fee.

We support our government doctors to improve their service conditions. They are facing many physical and verbal abuses especially in the social media. We need to do more to support them to correct some of the misperceptions.

c) The private doctors are facing more regulations, more litigations and more challenges with the insurers. We thank the MOH is supporting us in negotiating the business of medicine without infringing on the medical ethics. We uphold our Code of Professional Conduct and Good Medical Practice as expounded by Malaysian Medical Council.

Please allow our GP colleagues to continue to prescribe and dispense medications. This is convenient for patients and provide continuity of care.

As we await the biggest spectacle of the Rio Olympics, we marvel at the achievement of human endeavours and of sheer will power. Equally dramatic, if there was a failure in the team relay event. When you hear the clink of the hollow aluminium baton hitting the bitumen track, as the first runner fails to pass the baton to the second runner, the whole race is over for the team. Individual brilliance from each of the relay runner will not win the race if they fail to handover. Thus I feel it is the same for MMA. We need continuity with institutional memory, and an ability to execute and carry out the programs. MMA will not be able to survive the rapid changes. The solution is to corporatize and bring in professional management.

In conclusion,

MMA has to look into

1. Filling in the health gaps, the social economic inequalities especially during the early childhood years.
2. Looking after our older generation who are going to suffer more NCDs and need more aged care.
3. Strengthening our association as an esteem body to help in our nation building and a voice for our concerned doctors, and continue to work with other likeminded organisations like the Federation of Private Medical Association, PERDIM, MPCAM, and the Academy of Medicine.

Quoting Bernard Lown, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who said

“Never whisper when there is wrong.”

Thank you.

A Civil Action by Jonathan Harr. It is a story of a small cluster of childhood leukaemia cases in a town north of Boston. A local factory was pumping so much chemical into the water that it was coloured. The question was whether the chemical was causing the leukaemia. Difficult scientific question. Reading the book, riveted by the book, I was convinced that a legal process is not the best way to settle scientific questions of cause and effect.

Louise Ryan, now a statistics professor back in her native Australia, had had some involvement in this fascinating question while at Harvard. In case you are wondering, the legal case did not resolve it satisfactorily.

Standing here, I would like to bring your attention to the following drivers affecting healthcare.

1. Emergence of new technology, digital revolution, AI, machine learning revolution and robot making diagnosis.
2. New business models such as sharing economy like Uber or Grab.
3. Continuing greying of our population requiring redesigning our home, cities especially the transportation system.
4. Climate change and vector-borne diseases.

The 8-day strike by the NHS junior doctors highlighting the plight of tight budgets.

Health is in every sector.

Health and education are closely connected. When children are not healthy, they cannot learn as easily.

Virchoff said physicians are the natural advocates of the poor.

The health burden of our country, brought on by socio economic inequality and the other concern being the problems of medical personnel.

Doctors treat individuals who need care regardless of who they are and what made them sick. Each individual has the right to be treated with dignity. It is a core ethical concern for doctors.

Face with all these problems, what can we do? What should we do? We are faced with mountains of Non Communicable Diseases, the scourge of new and old emerging Infectious Diseases, Multi drug resistant Super bugs and the impact of Environmental degradations such as water shortages, air pollution and flooding. We must get our young people together to rethink, remould, reshape, re-programme a new set of values. We need young men and women with the intellect, impressive personality, vigorous in their will power to do the tasks. It will be a job for the strong and brave. We have to equip them well, teach them philosophy, literature and language. Philosophy is knowledge which is needed to reason, literature is needed to enhance thinking and the language to communicate. We need the young people as you and I will surely and truly ride into the sunset one day.

The defining moments of the 21st century are marked by the digital revolution and the rapidity of how things are changing. It is said we have seen changes in the last 3 years which took over 30 years before.

Quote: Eric Shinsekin US Army General, Secretary of Veteran Affairs “ If you don't like change, you are going to like irrelevance even less”

Cancer treatment is expensive. We thank the government for making all the drugs GST zero rated, so the patients do not have this extra burden. GST exempted is not the same as GST zero rated. This anomaly was successfully and very quickly corrected by the government. Thank you very much. In the same vein, we also like to have medical devices and medical consultation fees to be zero rated. Simplicity (fees) is the key to medical care affordability.

I am an Anaesthetist. This is my day and night job before I took up Medical Association work ten years ago.

Every day in my "day job", I see legs being amputated, patients with strokes, lines of patients for dialysis, coronary heart disease and cancers but there are still whiffs of cigarette smoke still floating in our kopitiams. I feel something is not right.

I am at the end of a disease process when things have not gone right. Are we doing the right thing at all?

Are we bedazzled with the new technological advances and the big chemical complexes that have built up around medicine? Do we want to play with machines and drugs all day long?

Sir Michael Marmot, President of the World Medical Association states that, "What good does it do to treat people and send them back to the conditions that made them sick."

We have to look at the conditions which make people sick.

Sir Michael Marmot, like me, graduated in Australia but left to do a life time work in Epidemiology. His work on "Social Determinants of Health" and his latest book "Health Gap" concluded that health disparities came from low social development in relation to the social classes. There is a gradient of health outcome across social classes ie, the rich live 10 years longer and healthier than the poor even in the same city. This Life expectancy difference is indeed very stark. The early years of childhood, education and development will make a difference. Parental leave to raise a child should be a right, not just a privilege. Time spend reading to a child is time well spent. More investment in early childhood education will alleviate the suffering of the next generation. We also have to look into our teenage pregnancy problems and family violence associated with poverty.

At this juncture, I would like to congratulate Prof Lekhraj Rampal of ASH committee (Action on Smoking and Health), together with the Health Promotion Board and UPM for successfully organising the Anti-smoking Art Competition. The 12002 entries have broken the Guinness Book of Records. It took 3 professional Artists two days to open and judge the entries. The first prize winner is from Sabah, second from KL and third from Sarawak. At least 36,000 people are exposed to this anti-smoking campaign.

Adolescent brains are the most vulnerable to addiction drugs. I am encouraged by the MOH warning about the hazards of vape. According to newspapers report usage of vape has dropped by 70%.

Amid economic prosperity we have 4 to 5 million foreign workers and 1.5 million undocumented workers. These

are the underclass and medically underserved. They are under stress, have low pay, dirty jobs and poor living conditions. They are important for our economy and especially many are carers for our aging society. As highlighted in our recent MMA "Right to Health" Seminar, many have unmet health issues, exposed to dangerous occupational hazards and many have mental health problems. Many will go underground if they are found out and deported. The undocumented needs to be registered so that the legitimate agencies like the UN Commission for Refugees can assist them.

Professor Richard Lanyard, the originator of Gross National Happiness Index listed Malaysia as number 47 in the world. After tonight's display by Miri, I think Miri is a happy place. The social development is excellent here. Top on the list of happy countries are Denmark and Switzerland. He found after 30 years of improved income and GDP, countries are generally not happier. Being happy includes good health, both physical and mental, and having gainful employment. Being happy depends on having an inner fortitude, a resilience to face difficulties in life, as well as having good family and strong community relationships. These factors are the makeup of our psychological health. We can do well if we find ways to improve our National Happiness Index.

WHO defines Health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Now allow me to highlight the problems of the medical profession.

a) The plight of the new doctors.

Many newly medical graduates are waiting for jobs. Nine months wait for house man job is only the start of the problems. While increase competition for jobs will sharpen the focus or improve "attitude", we have to be prepared for unintended consequences of these new changes. Many of these young graduates are the result of exploitative educational system. I don't know how much teaching of ethics are embedded in their medical curriculum. The altruistic value and giving back to society may be wanting when there are debts to pay, when they are exploited by "leeches, greedy and dishonest agents" of the system. Ref Russian grad letter the Star 14th May 2016. These young graduates will face an uncertain future.

Contract work is insecure and uncertain. Our young doctors must be able to concentrate on looking after their patients without worrying about getting their next job. We need longer contracts, hopefully 3 years after houseman to produce a trained doctor.

b) Brain drain from MOH:

Many senior specialists are leaving the government service, due to slow promotion and low morale. Promotions for UD54, Jusa C and Jusa B have been stagnant for the last three years.

We still need the service of retired Consultants as trainers for the alternative pathways for specialisation. This initiative by the MOH is very welcome to increase the pool of expertise.