

President's Message



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With Professor Jeffrey Sachs

As we see out the last few days of 2016, it is time to review and reflect on the events of the year with gratitude and hope for a better year ahead. It is time to take stock, put a mark and see how far we have come and what we need to do in the New Year.

2016 has been a difficult year, a year of turmoil.

2016 has seen world calamities such as the Syrian civil war culminating with the collapse of Aleppo. The battle for Aleppo started in 2012. Once a thriving city of three million and the financial centre of Syria with important historical sites, it has now been reduced to an apocalyptic rubble. Hospitals operated by the International Federation of Societies of Red Cross and Red Crescent were not immune to the bombs of war. This

war and other similar conflicts in Iraq and North Africa have resulted in the largest migration of refugees into Europe in history. We have seen untold hardship, suffering and death. This image will always dwell on the world's conscience.

Earthquakes in Italy, New Zealand, Ecuador, and Aceh give the impression that the world's tectonic plates are becoming increasingly unstable and ever shifting.

Smog in New Delhi and Beijing is a yearly affair. We are grateful that we have been spared of this hazard this year, thanks to the effort of our neighbours. We would do well to remember that WHO has updated the smog fact sheet in September 2016. Stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases including asthma are caused by air pollution. Let's recall the hazardous levels

quoted by WHO: The annual mean should not exceed $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of PM 2.5 and $20\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of PM 10. The daily mean should not exceed $25\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 2.5 and $50\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 10. Currently, we are not regularly made aware of the levels in Malaysia and perhaps greater public awareness of our air pollution levels would be a wise move for the future. Although there is no direct correlation between the increase in worldwide smog and the increase in lung cancer rates, I wonder if we are seeing the effects of the 1997 haze in our patients in general and specialist practice.

To cap the year off – we have water shortages, droughts, violent storms, flash flooding, unusually hot weather and power outages, which are all outward manifestations of climate change, the earth groaning in distress.

2016 has also shown some political upheavals; the Brexit in July and the unexpected victory of Donald Trump in November, the ascendancy of populism in the post-fact era. If a big lie was repeated often enough then it would be perceived as true (Goebel). Confusion, distortion and fantasy become reality. It would be interesting to see how Trump would repeal Obamacare. At least he has indicated that he might keep two of the law's most popular provisions:

1. To allow children up to the age of 26 years old to stay on the parents' plan.
2. To prevent insurance companies

from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions. In the insurance lingo this is called “guaranteed issue at community rates”, when the insurance premium is the same irrespective of pre-existing conditions.

Patients Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) commonly known as Affordable Care Act or Obamacare has allowed an extra 20 million people to be insured and for 2017, a record number has already signed up. Obamacare’s “individual mandate” recruits more young and healthy persons to contribute to the overall insurance pool. Individual mandate, guaranteed issue, community rates plus subsidies for catastrophic illnesses combined together make up Obamacare. However, to the Republican and the newly appointed Health Secretary Mr Tom Price, Obamacare is an extra tax with no freedom to opt out. It seems to be over regulation. It will be interesting to see how the politics play out and Malaysians will be keenly following as we are embarking on the Voluntary Insurance System.

The Malaysian Ringgit has fallen to its lowest level since the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis. The economy has suffered with inflation. Imports are going to be more expensive. Private hospitals have reported a fall of 30% business, so this is reflected in the shortfall of foreign patients as well as lesser affordability for the domestic market. This has put more strain on the Government health system with longer waiting queues. We expected many businesses to face difficulties. Unemployment and increased cost of living will add to the psychological stress. Social ills and crimes will likely increase.



Professor Jeffrey Sachs at Sunway University

These and many knock-on effects will surely test the resilience of the people. Our National Debt stood at RM684B with an interest payment estimated at RM25B, equivalent to our yearly Government Health expenditure. The whole region is similarly suffering the economic downturn. However, the petrol price has recovered somewhat and we hope for a better year ahead.

As we reflect on all these events, we have to recognise the causes, the influence and the society we have become.

Jeffrey Sachs Centre for Sustainable Development

I was privileged to be invited by the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation to the official launch of Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development at Sunway University on 9 December 2016 by Dato' Sri Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia. This was made possible by a USD10 million grant by Jeffrey Cheah Foundation to start the centre to do research and to train a new generation of students on sustainable development. The

Founding Director of the Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development is Professor Woo Wing Thye, also the President of the Jeffrey Cheah Institute of South East Asia at Sunway University.

It was indeed an honour to listen to the Inaugural Lecture by Professor Jeffrey Sachs on “The Grand Challenge of Global Diplomacy: Change, Conflict and Cooperation”. Professor Jeffrey Sachs is the author of several books, including “The Age of Sustainable Development” and “The End of Poverty”. He is the Economics Professor at Colombia University and Director of the Earth Institute. He was Adviser to two Secretary Generals of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan and Mr Ban Ki Moon, on the Millennium Development Goals and now the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. He is also said to be among the most influential living economists.

Jeffrey Sachs is a great thinker and drew from a wealth of research into the development of the world from the Age of Discovery from 1400 when European