

## EDITORIAL

## THE TRAINING OF A DOCTOR

When medicine was at its infancy, doctors learnt their art through an apprenticeship system, where by following the precepts and examples of their teachers over a period of time, they in due course grew to be physicians in their own right. It was an exacting burden for the teacher because under such an arrangement, he would be under constant surveillance by eyes which could be admiring and critical. It is no wonder that great teachers have been few in medical history. In the last fifty years, medical training has gradually joined the ranks of general education, and medical educators with new skills in communication, and new ideas in teacher-student relationship began to appear in the scene. The problem of learning has gradually become one of methodology of imparting knowledge mostly in the form of doctrinaire instructions. The teacher no longer feels that he is a personal example once he is outside the classroom, and the students too gradually confine their admiration to the instructors' skill and knowledge. Hence arises the famous saying "Do what I say, but do not follow what I do".

Unfortunately, the doctoring profession is not a form of education purely for the edification of one's own mind or the gratification of one's own intellectual curiosity. It is principally a service upon which human health and life depend. In the case of life and limbs, the attitude, the outlook, the moral integrity and courage, and the intellectual honesty and integrity are just as important as the skill, for the medical skill can be an agent for good or evil, and without apparently non-scientific attributes such as those mentioned, the doctors can be serious danger to the community at large, and the danger the greater when they become more knowledgeable and efficient!

This must mean that the training of a doctor is not a matter of transmitting knowledge of skills in diagnosis and therapeutics alone. Somewhere, somehow, the doctor aspirant must learn to acquire a professional conscience which at times may even transcends nationalism and legislature. Thus at war, an enemy is to be subdued or exterminated, and no one would

think of being kind, far less endangering one's own life in his service; but a doctor sees no conflict in rendering to a wounded foe as much care and skill even under conditions of great personal risk on the battlefield. Society generally feels no twinge of conscience to carry out judicial killing for some of its members, who offend in certain way such as treason or murder, but a doctor would be upset if a condemned man dying of an illness is given less than the best possible care to ensure his recovery!

If medical educators, like other educators, should feel that their duty to the profession is only in the classroom and their personal life and activity are matters of individual freedom of choice, then the professional conscience hitherto nurtured and strengthened by precept, example and personal emulation, would have to be taught elsewhere. Human behaviour cannot be influenced by words alone particularly if the words and action are contrary in spirit and practice from the same quarter. This must be the reason why educators in the present century fail so miserably in influencing social behaviour in spite of their insistence on the teaching of ethics, and civic conscience. The students everywhere are looking for new direction away from their teachers once they are confronted with problems beyond the technical knowledge of their books, and rightly so, for their teachers believe that they have a right to be as antisocial, as peculiar, as rebellious and as destructive as they please in their private living.

Would the medical profession at large fill this void which the educators have disclaimed, or would medical educators, being in the large majority of cases, practising doctors themselves, resume a role which their forerunners have not only cheerfully assumed but regarded it as a sacred duty to do? Without a speedy decision the community of the future might have to be served with doctors who are technicians caring more for their own intellectual advancement and financial interest than the safety and well-being of the sick people.

Gwee Ah Leng