

By Dr Jeremy Lim, Editorial Board Member

Behind the Stethoscope

What does it mean to be a doctor? What are the traditions and shared values that bind us together as a profession and make us worthy of public regard? Recent events including sex scandals and charges of profiteering have cast a disheartening shadow over the profession. It is thus serendipitous that a book that seeks to capture some of the traditions and experiences of the profession has been released. *Behind the Stethoscope*, a compilation of personal journeys, reflections and defining moments, was conceived by a team of healthcare workers including this writer, to capture these accounts and anecdotes which run the very real risk of being forgotten in this fast-paced, transient world of ours.

Over the last 6 months, 56 doctors (including this writer) have been busy penning their reflections of a life in medicine. Some of us described memorable patients, some their teachers while others reflected on a career in medicine and their defining moments. What was common to all was a humanness and humanity that distinguishes medicine from many other professions.

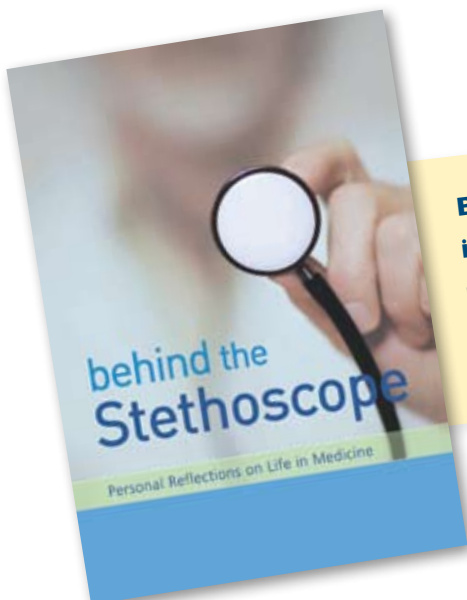
I was initially apprehensive about what we would receive in response to our call for contributions, worrying that our fellow doctors would be so caught up in the world of today that they would not have time to stop, reflect and leave something for posterity. Or even worse, we would be so cynical

that this effort would be seen as a 'warm and fuzzy', “骗小孩子” collection to brainwash young doctors and gullible medical students.

Thankfully, response was very positive and our contributors bared their souls and opened windows into very personal life events: Among many other stories, Dr Teo Eng Kiong wrote of how failing in his first attempt at the MRCP had changed his perspectives for the better; Dr Soo Khee Chee shared candidly his struggles as he journeyed through surgical apprenticeship; and Dr Leonard Ang very poignantly described how his father, the late Dr Ang Ah Ling, shaped him and his brothers through his living example of what being a doctor meant.

We perhaps patronisingly intended this compilation to 'teach' future generations of doctors but ended up learning so much ourselves of the ideals, hopes and aspirations of our peers and what they hold dear. I personally have discovered so much about this profession we call 'medicine' and re-ignited that spark of hope in our profession that we will rise above the controversies of today, the concerns over commercialisation, the perceived loss of standing with the public.

But the stories are not all hopeful and inspiring. They are actually very diverse. Some are melancholic and some even angry, but all reflect a life behind the stethoscope – what it means to be a doctor. ■



Behind the Stethoscope – Reflections of a Life in Medicine is available from all SingHealth retail pharmacies and the NUS Co-Operatives. All net proceeds will be donated to support needy patients.



Dr Lim is Director, Policy and Research for Singapore Health Services and heads the health services research programme for the cluster. This commentary is contributed in his personal capacity.