



The 4Qs

By Dr Chong Yeh Woei

I met up with my old friend in Hong Kong the other day. He had gone to Hong Kong to practise as a medical officer, did his training in Psychiatry, settled down and never came back to Singapore in a professional sense, except to visit friends and family.

We reminisced about the old days when we were in medical school together and the conversation turned to our children. Of course we never went to school to get a diploma in raising children but the conversation took an interesting turn. Our firstborns are both in their teens; my boy is 17 and his girl is 15. One of the topics turned to equipping our kids with skills to get on in life.

Everyone knows about Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ), which have been the subject of many a conversation. My view is that there is somehow the genetic assortment that results in a nicely-wired set of neurons, which gives optimal performance in IQ and to some extent, EQ.

What was more interesting was the next set of Quotients that came up in our chat. I had mentioned that my younger son was a feisty one and very determined. I always felt that that was an underrated quality that allowed people to do well in life – the drive, motivation and determination to persevere and succeed in the face of difficulty, adversity and tribulation. My friend then contributed the term “Adversity

Quotient” (AQ) and continued with a poignant story.

His father-in-law had come from Hokchew; there was a great famine in the region in the 60s and he had decided to build a boat to sail to Hong Kong. Because of this, he could bring his family along unlike the other migrants who swarmed into Hong Kong – every man for himself.

My friend’s wife grew up in refugee camps in Hong Kong built by the British to house these economic migrants. Eventually her family moved into subsidised housing and she grew up in a 200-square foot flat with nine other persons. She was endowed with IQ and was therefore spared the household chores as she had the



best grades in school. Her family could not afford tertiary education so she had to go to the Teachers' College as it was a heavily-subsidised course. My friend met her in the course of his Psychiatric work as a special-needs teacher.

The wife went on to complete a degree and Masters and is presently pursuing a Doctorate while holding a job, running the household, raising her two children and looking after her husband. Now, that was a prime example of Adversity Quotient and the thought in my mind on hearing the story was: how does one instill this in a child?

Perhaps the truth is that AQ is again likely to be partly genetically-predetermined and partly born out of predicament. One can imagine the situation in colonial Singapore and Hong Kong when immigrants from the hinterlands were swarming into the colonies and people were jostling to find livelihood, opportunities and education for themselves and their families. In fact some years ago, I had the opportunity to go back to my father's hometown in rural Hainan and realised that it took a brave man like my grandfather to step off his shores and venture forth into the unknown to find a way out of adversity. His hometown in Wenchang district was one of the most prosperous districts on the island and the reason for that was the hordes of returning migrants who had brought money, commerce and infrastructure back to their kin and clan from the diaspora across Southeast Asia.

Paradoxically the soil in Wenchang was the poorest compared to the dark volcanic soils further south, where one could grow almost anything. This was the push factor that led many migrants to make that fateful decision to leave. In a moment of serendipity, the poor soil had reaped the rewards for that district many decades later.

But enough of historical ruminations; we are indeed thankful that our children do not have to hone their AQ in the face of such uncertainties today.

Coming back to my interesting conversation, the last Quotient introduced was that of the Spiritual Quotient (SQ). We often think of SQ as that part of us intertwined with religion. I like to think that it is the part of us that believes in doing good, being charitable and at times behaving altruistically. I have previously touched on the positive idealism of

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our children's generation and I think this is part and parcel of the Spiritual Quotient. Encouraging our children to mix with all levels of society and to be kind and gracious to all would probably be a good start to cultivate their SQ. I have also found the concept of karma very useful on a personal basis to spread goodwill around without the expectation of receiving any instant gratification.

In a way, when we choose our medical students, we should be cognizant that this is a Quotient we would like our young doctors to have. Coincidentally, I see the ongoing climate change agenda as a powerful expression of this idealism and spirituality. The thought of looking

after Mother Earth has a potent spiritual quality to it and is no doubt a compelling, galvanising and influential rallying point for most of mankind.

As we move into this time of the year, it is most opportune to reflect on what has happened throughout the course of my term thus far. I had assumed Presidency in April, saw the H1N1 pandemic sweep through our shores, communicated with all parties on the Medical Registration Act and Residency issues and wrote quite a number of letters to the press. I recall that there were moments of stress, uncertainty and even self-doubt at times. What I appreciated greatly, and has brought me through is the steadfast support from my family, Council members, fellow doctors and dentists I work with, and most importantly the silent majority of my profession who has quietly without fuss given us the backing and confidence to move ahead with our work. To you all I wish you festive greetings of the season and all the goodwill I can muster. Thank you. SMA



Dr Chong is the President of the 50th SMA Council. He has been in private practice since 1993 and has seen his fair share of the human condition. He pines for a good pinot noir, loves the FT Weekend and of course, wishes for world peace...