cheaper “village” vineyards are our subsidised patients while the famous Grand Cru or Premier Cru vineyards are our private patients.

Another case in point would be that of our now defunct Guideline on Fees (GOF). We had withdrawn the GOF reluctantly and things are beginning to settle down to a new equilibrium. People have accepted that life must go on without GOF. SMA will in its own way continue to try and reduce information asymmetry and empower the patients and our members. In this month’s SMA News, you will see our very first survey on private specialist fees (Please see page 12). It is by necessity brief, since it is a survey that requires private specialists’ time and effort to fill up and is nowhere near the comprehensiveness of GOF, but it is still informative.

Readers of the Straits Times would also have seen the article on GOF by Prof Lee Wei Ling and the ensuing exchange of letters in the Straits Times Forum between the SMA and the Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS). We will stick to our principles. Since we reluctantly withdrew GOF, we should also seek to get it back if the authorities express a change of heart. The SMA council members will be financing the $3000 required by CCS from our own pockets. The reasons therein for this unusual decision are quite straightforward. The idea of GOF was mooted by the authorities some 20 years ago and it would be incongruent for us to use SMA funds to check with them if the existence of GOF was legal just because a new law was enacted. Hence, the personal decision by all 16 Council members to finance the payment of fees to CCS. We accepted that GOF had to be withdrawn in 2007, even as we try to get it back when the situation has changed.

The “good” news amid all this economic gloom is that a doctor’s lot always has been a bit better than the rest in a recession. We may not make as much in boom times as 30-year-old investment bankers but we make a decent living, rain or shine.

But then there are the poor. The poor will always be with us. They make little in boom times and even less in a recession. The SMA Medical Students’ Assistance Fund requires your support even more. While economic growth is stalling and more people need help as jobs are lost, costs of living have not fallen. In fact, the cost of living has gone up considerably since the SMA Medical Students’ Fund was formed slightly more than a year ago. It was with these factors in mind that the SMA council decided to increase the number of recipients of the Fund from 10 to 15 and also to increase the quantum paid to each needy medical student from $3600 to $4000 a year. I trust for all of us who are still making a good living with cash to spare, we will continue to donate to the Fund. Have a good holiday season.

Osler’s Notes

A man must have faith in himself to be of any use in the world. There may be very little on which to base it – no matter, but faith in one’s powers, in one’s mission is essential to success. Confidence once won, the rest follows naturally; and with a strong faith in himself a man becomes a local centre for its radiation.