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Running short of time

T P Lam 林大邦

Editor, *The Hong Kong Practitioner*

This Editorial has been one of the most difficult papers for me to write. I prepared one manuscript but, at the last minute, decided that it wasn't what I liked for my last Editorial. I then turned to my bookshelf and started looking at the different issues of *HK Pract* that I have edited since 1994.

Well, I think we have come a long way since then, not just *HK Pract* but also the discipline of Family Medicine and the College. The first thing that struck me when I looked at the 1994 issues was the old name of the College. Our College was known as the Hong Kong College of General Practitioners, since renamed the Hong Kong College of Family Physicians. The change of name did not involve any change in the substance of our discipline. However, the name change has no doubt helped to strengthen our identity, so that, both in the eyes of the public and among our medical colleagues, Family Medicine is seen as a specialty in its own right. So it should be. Primary care forms the domain of Family Medicine and most patient-doctor contact in our community happens in the primary care context. I am therefore glad that, through the hard work of many dedicated members of our discipline, the image and identity of Family Medicine is much stronger than it was in 1994.

Government has recognised, in recent years, the importance of Family Medicine in the overall provision of health care to its citizens. This has resulted in the Family Medicine vocational training scheme now being the largest training scheme among all specialties in the public system. This is a far cry from 1994 when there were few trainees in the Department of Health and none in the Hospital Authority. This sudden surge in the number of trainees is also providing a formidable challenge to our discipline. We must not sacrifice quality for the sake of quantity. Otherwise, the quality of primary care will continue to attract undue negative attention, as was the case in the Harvard Report. Like all of you, I am eagerly awaiting Government's much-delayed Green Paper on health care reform, which, I expect, will create further opportunities for the development of Family Medicine in Hong Kong. A quality primary care system is the foundation of a quality health care system. Because of these impending changes, the next few years will be a great testing time for the medical profession as a whole.

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As for *HK Pract*, it is really up to you, our readers, to decide on the progress it has made over the last few years. There have been changes in both style and contents. These changes were direct responses to your feedback and comments. However, I basically still see *HK Pract* being a journal run by family physicians for family physicians. On the one hand, I am glad to see the increased contributions by family physicians in the contents of *HK Pract* in the past couple of years. On the other hand, I also see it as the area where much improvement is still possible.

There are other issues that I would like to write about but time is running out ... And the printer won't wait for me.

Finally, I would just like to share with you what Dr E K Yeoh, Secretary for Health and Welfare, wrote in the Health section of this year's Policy Address, "*Health is fundamental to life and integral to the well being of an individual over a life time and is the key to a productive, vibrant and prosperous community...*"

May I take this opportunity to wish you all good health. ■