



Title	Pathology of trauma-delayed traumatic deaths
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Citation	The 1st International Congress of Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, Hong Kong, China, 26-29 November 1998. In Hong Kong Medical Journal, v. 4 n. 4 suppl., p. 53
Issued Date	1998
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10722/54186
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20.6 Understanding the family dynamics of the heart sink patient

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Heartsink patients are those who generate a sense of frustration in their attending doctor. They are usually the recurrent attenders with multiple vague complaints, for whom multiple investigations cannot identify the cause of their symptoms, and no amount of drugs or reassurance can calm their fears of serious diseases. Yet they keep returning as if to prove that their doctor is incompetent and powerless to help and heal them.

The family is one of the most important determinants of our patients' health. It affects the genetic inheritance, and provides both physical and psychosocial nurture in a person's development, disease prevention and/or management. A family evolves over time through a number of phases, each with its particular tasks and predictable stresses. The intricacies of family relationships can be both a source of support in illness as well as a source of illness. In the past decade, the Hong Kong Chinese family has experienced unusual challenges with the impact of economy and emigration.

An understanding of how family dynamics can affect a person's health and his/her illness behaviour can be a key to unlock the impasse of the doctor-heartsink patient relationship, and provide new horizons for diagnosis and management of the patient's condition.

The speaker will discuss the importance of the above topics in medical education.

21.1 Pathology of trauma-delayed traumatic deaths

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A retrospective study of autopsy findings of all cases of traumatic deaths referred to the Coroner at a teaching hospital for the year of 1997. Results of this study will be discussed and patterns of trauma analysed.