

Doctor for Society: a corner to showcase exemplary models and promote volunteerism

Prolific literature in the field of social science tells us that voluntary community service offers positive rewards in almost all aspects of life. Back in the 1980s, Fischer and Schaffer¹ reported self-satisfaction, potential acquisition of new skills, socialisation, and psychological well-being as components of the spectrum of benefits. From a community perspective, volunteering can bring forth altruism, community improvement, social integration, and at the same time foster an overall experience of participation and trust among community members. According to Maslow,² there exists a real opportunity that a volunteer could experience self-actualisation and self-transcendence, the highest levels of needs hierarchy for human beings. For many years, it has been recognised that community service on a volunteer basis, out of a good intent, can bring forth experiences of dignity, justice, meaning, mastery, and love for others.³

From the report on the 20th International Association for Volunteer Effort World Volunteer Conference, volunteer community services have been depicted as efforts founded on love, freewill, and respect for human dignity.⁴ Freewill is a matter of the mind, whereas love is a matter of the heart and embodies the spirit of respect for our beloved. Without participation however, there can be no volunteering. The impact of voluntary community service is maximally realised through active and concerted participation.⁴

The Millennium Declaration and its goals were adopted and projected by the United Nations in September 2000. In Article 2, under "Values and Principles", the Declaration denotes "...we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level...". Subsequently in Article 4, it states "... We rededicate ourselves to...support all efforts to uphold respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...". Therefore, national volunteer centres and voluntary service providers are constructively contributing by participation in public policy formulation at a relatively global and macro level. They are influential in achieving the purposes of both promoting volunteerism and consolidating initiatives to build a better society.⁴

Nevertheless, given the nature of their work, medical doctors are probably in less advantaged positions to schedule volunteer services, although it has been receiving increasing attention in recent

years. As they are recognised as among the busiest of all professionals, medical doctors need to overcome various barriers, including time and having to make an additional effort in the course of their packed schedules. Voluntary community services offered by members of our profession therefore need a very strong commitment, and sometimes, entail important sacrifices. Hence, it deserves more peer recognition and societal support.

Beginning with this issue of the Journal, we are setting up a corner entitled "*Doctor for Society*". The major objective of this new corner is to let our readers appreciate the activities and achievements of medical doctors who contribute substantially to society on a voluntary basis. Through reports of these activities, we wish to disseminate the message that medical doctors can have a significant impact in the community, even outside the setting of clinics and hospitals. Their achievements and services towards the underprivileged and needy will thus be recognised and could be seen as exemplary models for others to follow, particularly the younger members of our profession. We also wish to make their stories interesting and attractive to readers, whilst also contributing our part in support of the Millennium Declaration Goals.

Our first interviewee featured in this issue is Dr Nim-chung Chan, an experienced and dedicated ophthalmologist who worked in Afghanistan for more than 6 years for humanitarian causes. He will share with us his participation as the Chief Executive of the CEDAR fund (Christian response to poverty, Education, Development, Advocacy and Relief programme), which has exerted tremendous impact to his life, and which has translated into huge community contributions. We are very grateful to Dr Chan, whose services have initiated a fresh corner for our new section, and acted as an exemplary model for our readers.

In composing these articles, we have heavily involved medical students from the faculties of both universities with medical schools. In March 2012, The Editor-in-Chief of the *Hong Kong Medical Journal* has appointed 15 such medical undergraduates as 'Student Reporters'. By inviting our younger doctors-to-be to interview the nominated interviewee doctors and write up a comprehensive in-depth report, we believe that the experience will be even more engaging. Thanks go to the voluntary efforts of our Student Reporters.

In addition to appreciation and recognition of our interviewee doctors, this new section should also act as a 'call for action'—because quite apart from the services we need to contribute in the international arena, our local community also suffers from a severe shortfall of societal services. The socio-economically underprivileged, the physically challenged, the chronically disabled, those with special care needs, and people at the edge of psychological collapse are just some of those who need help. The knowledge and skills of medical doctors need not be confined just to clinics, but could be a precious resource for

our society in other spheres, by exerting a significant impact in these other settings. We trust and wish that you will enjoy this new section and pass on the sharing of our guest interviewees to your colleagues and friends!!

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References

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3. Volunteerism—overview. Available at: <http://cas.umkc.edu/casww/sa/Volunteerism.htm#Overview>. Accessed 12 May 2012.
4. Report on the 20th IAVE World Volunteer Conference April 2-5, 2008, Panama City. "Volunteering for Human Development: more solidarity, less poverty". Available at: <http://www.volunteerlink.net/datafiles/A022.pdf>. Accessed 12 May 2012.