

Public Perception and Expectations of Hospice

Those of us who have been operating hospice programmes for some time end up with our own idea of how the public views our efforts (generally good) and how to develop and improve our programme (not so clear). Polls and surveys are critical tools in any set-up which needs to remain relevant to clients' needs as seen in politics worldwide where long-serving parties have suddenly found themselves voted out of favour. In our context, such surveys of public views on hospice will be extremely useful. As hospice providers, we lament the lack of knowledge about the relevance and appreciation of palliative care among mainstream medical workers. How much more this ignorance must be in the lay community, except for those who have actually benefited from a hospice service. Arising from this ignorance, one would expect that the general public's expectations can be quite wide off the mark on what traditional hospice philosophy promotes which is the improvement of quality of life through symptom control and empowering patient and family carers so as to maintain self independence, dignity and hope as long as possible while the illness progresses. Do patients and/or families expect more than this? Do they want us to come in and take over the care and management and everything else. Do they equate hospice service with in-patient service? How many times do we feel that maybe we haven't done so well in providing emotional/spiritual support or missed an opportunity that came and went too fast. Lack of training and trained workers is too apparent but where we have sensed and been commended on our good efforts, do we know what aspect of our efforts were being praised. While medical and nursing care remains the bedrock of hospice care under all circumstances and can be well managed in good hospices, the largely unpredictable areas of psychological, emotional and spiritual support that need to be addressed in a full fledged hospice service, still bring up interesting and challenging cases. Indeed each new hospice case is unique because of this. In this country with its diverse cultures, religions and ethnic beliefs and practices, training in counseling, pastoral care, grieve and bereavement support needs even more attention. Aside from this, there is also a need to conduct surveys among different sections of the community – those who have used hospice services in one or more forms (home care, day care, in-patient), those who haven't accessed such services before. Is the Society ready to perform such a survey?

New Members

Ordinary member Dr. Balkees Abdul Majeed [O-32(09)], Ms Sukhveer Kaur [O-33(09)]

Season's Greetings

We wish our members of the Hindu and Christian faiths a **Happy Deepavali** and a **Merry Christmas**

Coming events

Penang Health Care Expo at Caring Society Complex, Jalan Utama from 10 am to 7 pm. Rumah Hospice will be organizing food stalls during the expo in the foyer of the complex.

20th Joint Clinical Meeting of Penang Hospice Groups organized by Chgaris Hospice on Thursday 26th Nov 2009 in Seminar Room, 4th Floor ACC Block, Hospital Pulau Pinang from 2.15 - 4.30 pm. **Music For Life** a musical evening in aid of Hospice-at-Home at **Dewan Sri Pinang** from 7.30 - 10.30 pm The evening is organized by Jammin' Sensation who has brought together local artistes performing songs and dance (ballet, hip-hop, modern and gymnastic) and jazz. Tickets are available at the door.

Relay For Life 10 will be launched in January and promises to be an even bigger event than last year's.

9th Malaysian Hospice Congress will be held from 7 - 9 May 2010 in Ipoh and hosted by the Perak Palliative Care Society of Ipoh. Details will be posted later.

Recent Happenings



The Penang Hospice Society held its **7th AGM** on 8th August 2009 at Rumah hospice with 25 members present. Although it was not an election year, the meeting recognized that the present Committee would be starting a new year with the heavy task of officially taking over the Hospice-at-home programme from 1st Jan 2010. Members were asked to renew their enthusiasm to help in whatever way possible to achieve this.

Annual Basic Palliative Care Course from Doctors and Nurses. A 3-day course was held from Tues - Thurs 11 - 13 August 2009 at City Bayview Georgetown Hotel and attended by 10 doctors and 40 nurses from various hospitals in the northern states. From the response, it was clear that there is a need for such courses to continue.

Chinese Popular Religion

Abstracts from *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, 2nd Edition 2006, pg 80-83. Published by the Chinese Heritage Centre, Singapore. General Editor Lynn Pan with preface and introduction by Wang Gungwu.

The form of religion most widely practiced in both historical and contemporary overseas Chinese communities is Chinese Popular Religion, sometimes referred to by its practitioners simply as 'worshipping the Gods' or 'baishen'. Often mistakenly labeled 'Buddhism' Chinese Religion is based on a heterogenous mixture of ancestor worship with elements deriving from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucian sources as well as from traditional Chinese folklore and religious practices indigenous to the places where the Chinese have established communities.

..... Versions of Chinese Religion among different overseas settlements have at least 4 salient features in common: a belief system founded on the assumption that gods and ghosts not only exist but possess the power to influence human affairs; the mapping of a non-human realm mirroring the hierarchy and practical conditions of traditional Chinese social life, subscription to the notion that fate (ming) and luck (yun)

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are the key determinants of life and that the effects of luck can be manipulated with the help of gods and ghosts to modify the otherwise absolute nature of fate; the assumption that the human soul has two discrete components, namely regenerate and personal soul-portion, which become separated at time of death.

Influenced by Hindu and orthodox Buddhist notions of karma, Chinese religion essentially pursues the practical outcome of achieving peace and avoiding suffering either in this life or the next, depending on the circumstances of the individual. Peace takes the form of hao ming (a good life) and fuqi (one's allotted happiness) in this life, and a good rebirth and tranquil happiness through attainment of godhead in the next. Suffering in this life is the reverse of haoming and fuqi, while in the next life, it takes the form of torture in the Underworld and rebirth as an animal. It goes without saying that as Chinese Religionists grow older, the focus of their concern shifts from this life to the next.

... peace and suffering in this life are the result of fate, and since fate is understood as being both absolute and knowable only in retrospect, not only is one powerless to bring about radical changes to one's life but one cannot be certain whether fate has dealt one a good or poor hand until one's life ends. This predisposition towards fatalism imposes limitations on the range of possible religious actions available to practitioners of Chinese Religion, while providing the very basis for their religious activity in the first place.

Thus Chinese Religion is centered on divinatory practices by means of which an individual formulates and deploys strategies for coping with his or her perceived lot in life with the aid of gods and ghosts. Concerns with good versus evil and truth versus falsehood, prominent in Salvationist religions such as Christianity and Islam, are largely absent from Chinese Religion. The utilitarian focus of Chinese Religion militates against such metaphysical enquiry. Rather, what is provided is a range of simple but extremely versatile blueprints from practical action which can be implemented to a greater or lesser degree by practitioners across different socio-economic classes and educational levels.

Any attempt to define Chinese in theological terms is fraught with risks since it is non-canonical and relies primarily on the carrying out of symbolic action or ritual (as opposed to the know-

ledge and interpretation of scripture) for its substance. It belongs to a Little Tradition, as opposed to the Great Tradition represented by canonical Buddhism and other scripture-based sectarian religions. The tremendous importance accorded learning and thus textual authority in traditional culture is the reason many Chinese Religionists label themselves "Buddhists" despite having little or no knowledge of the Buddhist canon. What they are signaling in this context is their respect for the superior authority of Buddhism as a Greater Tradition. Similar respect is given to the texts which make up the Confucian and Daoist canons.

In many ways, the rituals and symbolic values of Chinese religion are simply direct extensions of conventions and protocols within traditional Chinese culture. Ancestor worship, for instance, derives part of its legitimacy from the importance attached to filial piety in Confucian orthodoxy. In Chinese Religion, the sanctity of filial piety is translated into rituals – rituals which help to consolidate the collective identity of the family and the clan by symbolically bridging the gap between the human realm of living descendants and the non-human realm of departed ancestors.

...The assumption that human and non-human realms can be bridged through appropriate rituals is fundamental to Chinese Religion. It provides the comforting narrative of a universe made up of a vast and ordered network of complementary relationships by which all human lives are ultimately guided. What is more, this network is imagined to be ever-expanding and changing as a consequence of human action and historical events.

Basic PC Course 11-13 Aug 09



Merican Charity Drive '09

Merican Charity Bhd launched a charity drive to benefit 5 NGOs doing charitable work on Sunday 6 Sept 09 at Gurney Plaza from 12 - 4 pm. Rumah Hospice, one of the beneficiaries, put up an exhibition on cancer awareness. Raffle tickets with prizes including a Proton Saga, Rolex Oyster Watch, Honda motorcycle to be drawn on 31 Oct 09 were sold to sponsor a head shaving by volunteers and an ice-cream eating contest. A Quiz was held as were dances by Celebrity Fitness and Danzity Dance School.

