

Pay attention to your education and work and see how much you can add to life

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It is a great pleasure to be with Dr. Terence Rogers, former Dean of the John A. Burns School of Medicine, and witness the passing of a torch, if you may, from the teacher, who dedicated himself to a lifetime of medical education, to a former student, who by an uncharted course and with a minimum of institutional experience and mandate pursued a goal so far reaching in consequences that only a fool would dare take.

With the support of key individuals, the challenges of training indigenous physicians to care for their communities in the most appropriate setting were faced. What a radical ideal! For over thirty years only a dismal number of islanders qualified in medical programs in the US and even fewer returned. Such was the state of the physician workforce throughout this region in the early 1980's

At the Pacific Basin Medical Officers Training Program (PBMOTP), the learning experience both for the teacher and the student, despite all the frustrations, has been tremendous. The early introduction of students to the clinical setting and their participation in ongoing public health efforts have been the unique contributions of the PBMOTP to the moulding of the Pacific physician. The sense of pride for a job well done will echo around the Pacific Basin well into the 21st century.

Graduates, what are you going to do next now that you have completed your studies? I suggest you take a good and last look at the diploma that is awarded to you and place it in a safe place, i.e. send it to your mother to display. Remember: you must continue on with your training. The road you have chosen is long and difficult, full of irony and surprise, disap-

pointment, frustration and failure and occasionally a triumph. However, success means endurance and perseverance. I remember a teacher who said: "All things come to him who has learned to labor and wait, who bides his time, whose talent develops in the quiet fruitful years of unselfish devoted work. Pay attention to your education and your reputation will take care of itself and someday perhaps you will wake up quite suddenly to find those years of quiet work done for the love of it has gained very solid value." I would like to impress on you three things:

First, you must set up goals and priorities for the next three years. Notice, I did not distinguish between personal and professional goals because they should be the same. The

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hardest thing I have found out in life is attempting to do two things at the same time. Stay focused, concentrate on one thing, learn all the skills, the know how and the knowledge to be a competent health provider. That means work, that means reading, that means applying what you read to what you are faced with in practice. Remember that mere experience is not the same as clinical wisdom. Learn from your patients, listen to

them and keep the promises you make to them. Learn from each other and that means keeping in touch. Do not make the mistakes we did.

Second, you must be willing to change. Take whatever your teachers showed you about history taking, physical diagnosis, pathological process and treatment plans. Use them as guidelines and modify them as new medical information becomes apparent: new ideas building on previous knowledge. Be prepared to change with the times, otherwise, you will be left in the same location in the stream, wondering why there are no more fish because they have moved. It reminds me of the fisherman from northern Palau who reminisced when he could make a lure out of coconut fronds and a rag of cloth to catch fish in the ocean. He complained about the new bright squid skirts on shiny metallic lures and totally breaks down when he finds out that newer method is to fashion fish bait to the lure. He does not change and so he does not catch any fish. The way to keep up with change is

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to read. You must make it a habit to spend one hour every day to read on various subjects of general interest to medicine. Distance learning through telemedicine is a good example of innovative approach to consultation and provides the breadth of view possible only by long distance travel and enormous expense.

Third, the education of the heart must keep pace with the education of the head.

Patients may come to you because they have been negligent in their lifestyles - victims of an accident or ignorant of health matters. They may be demanding and do not seem to appreciate the time and effort you have put in their care. You may begin to think that perhaps you are in the wrong field and assume an attitude of carelessness. I have had these

feelings but I tell myself it is just one day out of the 364 and I have many good days. I also keep reminding myself that it is appropriate for local physicians to care for their own people because we speak the language and we understand how our patients live and relate.

“ ... the education of the heart must keep pace with the education of the head. ”

It is your duty to better the heritage of birth and fortune. What the teacher found as glass and made crystal, so the student is urged to find crystals

and make pearls and scatter them all across the Pacific Basin. Finally, I would like to impress upon you the value of honest work, the philosophy which insists that we are here, not to get all we can out of the life about us but to see how much we can add to it. □