

Message from Dr KS Chan - Ex-chairman

Facing powerlessness

To befriend death and dying is to learn living with powerlessness.

Encountering people at the end of life is a humble experience. While facing the irresistible finitude of life, one's outward seemingly powerful self is gradually stripped away, leaving behind a naked powerless self...

To sense powerlessness, nevertheless, may be an insightful moment. Suddenly we realise things that we used to be proud of, whether it is medical knowledge, skills, experiences, credentials, could hardly deliver us from this powerlessness.

“Love is two solitudes present, protect and salute each other.”

The following stories capture two moments of caring, when the sense of powerlessness is transcended..

1. Blessing each other as a way of care.

Recently I overheard a father and daughter in their last moments together. Standing near the departure gate, they hugged and the father said, “I love you. I wish you enough.”

The daughter said, “Daddy, our life together has been more than enough. Your love is all I ever needed. I wish you enough too, Daddy.” They kissed and she left.

He walked toward the window near to where I sat.

Standing there, he wanted and needed to cry. I tried not to intrude into his privacy, but he welcomed me in by asking, “Did you ever say good-bye to someone knowing it would be forever?”

“Yes, I have,” I replied. Saying that brought back memories I had of expressing my love and appreciation for all my Dad had done for me. Recognizing that his days were limited, I took the time to tell him face to face how much he meant to me. So I knew what this man was experiencing.

“Forgive me for asking, but why is this a forever good-bye? I asked.

“I am old and she lives much too far away. She has challenges ahead and the reality is, her next trip back would be for my funeral,” he said.

“When you were saying good-bye, I heard you say, ‘I wish you enough’. May I ask what that means?”

He began to smile. “That’s a wish that has been handed down from previous generations. When we said, “I wish you enough,” we were wanting the other person

to have a life filled with just enough good things to sustain them.

“I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright. I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more. I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive. I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger. I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting. I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess. I wish enough “Hello’s” to get you through the final Good-bye....”

2. The noblest act exceeds the limit of care.

Two ladies, one a young American, the other an elderly Chinese, are in-laws who had not met each other for years. Twenty-six years after their first encounter, they both became progressively disabled. The young lady is at her golden year of forties, yet suffers from refractory and crippling Rheumatoid Arthritis. She requires the aid of a walking stick. The eighty years old lady requires a walking frame because of the unsteady gait from multi-infarcts, cerebellar degeneration, knees deformity and progressive frailty. Under special arrangement, the young lady fled to Hong Kong, meeting her mother-in-law, and they lived together for a week.

They both understand quite well that this probably is the last chance of seeing one another.

Because of the desire to communicate, they overcome the barrier of words by body languages. After knowing more about the crippling condition of the daughter-in-law in her prime years, the old lady wept. Everyday, it took a long time for the young lady in struggling to rise from a chair. Despite the mother-in-law is much older, much weaker, and frail; every time her hands reached out to help the young lady. One Sunday morning, while the maid is off, the old lady insisted to stay at home looking after the young lady, even in reality, she is the person who needed to be cared more.

The noblest act of caring is crystalised in this scene: it is not the strong reaching out to the weak, but the weaker to the weak. This noblest act of care demonstrates genuine care transcending the limit of competence. It is the desire to care amidst powerlessness. It transcends the limit of care...

Mother, I salute you.