

(continued from Page 17: Behaviour Change Counselling)

as described above can be used for confidence in a similar manner to structure the conversation. If confidence is low, the problem might be that the foreseen barriers are too great to overcome, or that the proposed change is too drastic.

For example, for a patient who had been sedentary for most of their life, advising them to perform 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise every week can be too high a bar. Instead, ask how much exercise your patient is confidently able to do and work from there.

SMART goals can be incorporated when discussing confidence; the patient can assess their confidence at performing a **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound goal.

An example of a SMART goal is as below:

- Start to brisk walk from the bus stop to home after work for 15 minutes, 3 times a week to improve cardiovascular fitness by the next appointment in 3 months' time.

III. READINESS

If *importance* and *confidence* are sufficiently high, the only question left is “when”?

Discussion will then focus whether the patient will start immediately or on a specified date and how they might manage other priorities. At the follow-up appointment, the clinician can check on progress, acknowledge effort and address difficulties that arise.

We usually work in highly time pressured settings where applying this model may seem laborious and time consuming. However, with the opportunity afforded by continuity of care that Family Physicians provide, the entire process can take place over multiple consultations opportunistically.

A deep understanding of our patients' psychosocial characteristics common in doctor-patient relationships enables us to more easily engage in a rich discussion on behaviour change.

■ CM

INTERVIEW WITH DR ZURAIMI MOHAMED DAHLAN AND DR ELLY SABRINA *About Marital Bliss*

Interviewed by Dr Lim Khong Jin Michael, Family Physician, Editor (Team B)

College Mirror (CM): Hi Dr Zuraimi and Dr Elly, thank you for kindly agreeing to open up to us about your marriage so that we can all learn from each other. Please begin by sharing with us how you met your spouse.

Dr Zuraimi Mohamed Dahlan (ZMD): We met for the first time at Jam N Hop @ NUSARTS. Those were the days before COVID-19. I was a freshman and Dr Elly was a third-year senior at NUS Medical School. I knew her prior to the encounter via newspaper.

The first time meeting her in person, and I was immediately charmed by her. Seniority was never a hindrance to me. We kept bumping into each other thereafter at Medical Library and outside Lecture Theatres.

Dr Elly Sabrina (ES): We first met to the strains of “I hate myself for loving you”, that NUS Jam N Hop anthem which used to kickstart the new matriculation year.

I was in my third year of medical school and he was fresh out of the army, disrupted from national service. He walked right up to me and said, “Hi. Aren't you that girl on Berita Harian who scored 9A1s for O level exams?” I was not impressed with his pick-up line as I was appalled that he

could still remember my “nerdy” me during secondary school days.

At that point of time, I was busy trying to shed my previous “chow mugger” look with contact lens and a new hairstyle. Anyway, I was not keen about dating a junior.

CM: How did you know you were right for one another?

ZMD: We decided to stay as friends at first. Medical school was tough. Getting by first year was a big hurdle for me. Failing Anatomy and Physiology meant that I had to sit for the Re Exams and there was no time for social activities.

Only after I passed my Re Exams that I paused to take a breather and started seeing Dr Elly more regularly. Both of us were on the lookout for a life partner. I was lucky I met her at the right time. We remained close friends for 7 years before we finally got married. Those 7 years were important as that was the time, we got to know each other well enough to commit to each other.

In any relationship, time is important. Time enables us to be sure that who we are meeting is genuine towards us and

that we are not in a relationship for frivolous reasons or trying to take advantage of each other. We did a lot of “what if” scenarios which served as pre-nuptials, forging further understanding between us.

ES: Fortunately, Zuraimi was very persistent. And thanks to Ignatius Mark, the then Social Secretary (who fulfilled his role brilliantly by passing my contact number to Zuraimi) and another medical couple turned husband-and-wife team Chua Mei Chien and Desmond Choo (who helped arrange the many incidental meetups), we became an item.

I have to say that Zuraimi was very focused and very sure of taking the relationship all the way to marriage and that convinced my indecisive self. Jokes aside, we shared a lot of similar life experiences, goals, and aspirations. We talked easily about anything and took turns supporting each other through rough patches in medical school. I knew I was marrying my best friend.

CM: Please elaborate on three things that you appreciate about your spouse.

ZMD: We are different in many ways, but we always have this intention of doing things together and making things right.

We never call it quits: We were challenged in many ways. Our first-born premature child had learning difficulty and we had to tag team looking after her post NICU and sending her for various therapies. Our resources went towards her.

Willing to start active lifestyle and lifelong learning: We invested in exercise only after 7 years of marriage. It was not easy coaxing Dr Elly to start active lifestyle. We started with a Model Personal Trainer. Then we moved on to Ex-Bodybuilder Personal Trainer. Now we have 3 trainers coaching us resistance training, boot camp and rock climbing. We enjoy our coaching sessions together. Lately, both of us are taking a course in Diploma in Acupuncture together and we are back in school again together!

Learn to sooth our wounds: We made a bad decision in investing in a chain of restaurants resulting in us losing our investment. Nevertheless, we learn not to trust people so easily.

ES: Zuraimi is a man of grit, a man of his word and a man with a very big heart. He is very hardworking and does not give up easily. He is reliable, trustworthy and does not make empty promises. He is very charitable, generous, treats my

family members very well and I dare say, he is my mom’s favourite son. He cares about his community deeply and volunteers whenever time permits.

CM: Do you need to continue to work towards building your relationship or is it on auto pilot?

ZMD: Autopilot does not exist. Relationship is a continuous fluid process. It starts with solid foundation of trust, truthfulness, love, dedication, hard work and grit.

Next comes shared responsibilities and accountabilities. Decision making on business, children, pets, home, helper, vacation, investment, donations are all made transparently and openly. We discuss our issues facing us at length until a reasonably comfortable decision is arrived and we stick to it. We do not emotionally torment or hurt each other and neither do we become physical with one another during our quarrels or disagreement.

Certain topics taboo to Dr Elly can be discussed only during light-hearted moods. We have this deep trust in each other that we do not ever try to cheat or outwit one another. Dr Elly has access to my phone and bank accounts at her fingertips. There is no secret between the 2 of us. To date we still discover new things about each other even after 30 years of knowing each other!

ES: I do not think any marriage works on autopilot; only sitcom ones. We had many challenges along the way. One came fast

and furious more than a year after marriage when my mom was diagnosed with colorectal cancer and I had severe preeclampsia during pregnancy which ended in an emergency caesarean delivery.

Our firstborn was not only extremely premature with health issues but was diagnosed to have Autistic Spectrum Disorder later at three years of age. In between, my late dad developed Parkinson’s disease and a good part of our early years of marriage was spent juggling work, caring for a special needs child and the medical needs of my parents.

Somehow, we managed to survive this turbulent period through a lot of faith in The Almighty, in each other and support from family and friends. We realized the importance of health and strength, physically, mentally, and spiritually to take care of our loved ones. We formed a tag-team to care



Dr Zuraimi and Dr Elly: Share interests, passions and goals other than the bed to keep the love burning strong!

(continued on the next page)

(continued from Page 19: Interview with Dr Zuraimi Mohamed Dahlan and Dr Elly Sabrina about Marital Bliss)

for our kids, aged parents and clinics whilst making sure each of us has time for selfcare in the form of exercise, religious classes, and other pursuits.

CM: What are three things that you wish to do together with your spouse in the next ten to twenty years?

ZMD: Attain economic independence together, travel the world together safely and stay optimally healthy together.

ES: In the next ten to twenty years, I wish to remain healthy and active with Zuraimi so we can hopefully travel the world and continue discovering new experiences and skills. In the same breath, we wish to have an active role in the care of our grandchildren, God willing. Finally, we hope to be better servants of God who have been so forgiving and caring towards us in our life journey so far.

CM: What are three tips on marital bliss that you will like to share with those who are contemplating marriage?

ZMD: Marriage is a journey in life. Death is the ultimate end point in this world. Why not journey life together and be a comfort to each other despite the ups and downs that we face in this world.

For the relationship to work, both must play their roles effectively and accountably. Like a kayak with 2 rowers. Both must humbly and amicably decide on a particular direction and row in sync. Only then the journey would be smooth and pleasant despite the current, wind and waves coming in all directions.

Do not ever cheat or lie to your spouse. The truth hurts but it is better than hiding the truth from your spouse. Be generous towards your family, especially your spouse. Shower her with love, comfort, and kindness always as we do not know whether we have the same chance the next day.

ES: Communication is key. Never stop talking to each other about everything, especially the difficult ones. No matter how much we differ in opinions or argue, try to resolve them by the end of the day. Never go to bed angry with your spouse. You will get a major headache that may linger for days!

Be loving to one another. Never shy away from showing or communicating your affections. Be each other's BFF. Share interests, passions and goals other than the bed to keep the love burning strong!

■ CM

INTERVIEW WITH DR TAN SIANG HON

About Working Overseas and Bringing Up Children

Interviewed by Dr Lim Khong Jin Michael, Family Physician, Editor (Team B)

College Mirror (CM): Hi Siang Hon, please share with us some background about your work overseas.

Dr Tan Siang Hon (TSH): I lived overseas for a period of 12 years in North-western China with my family. My two older sons were 5 and 3 years old when we first left Singapore. Our third son was born only after we were away from home for about 3 years.

I was initially involved in some community work amongst different Chinese minorities in a small city one-hour's drive from the Kazakhstan border. Later, I was involved in a medical project that looked after the healthcare needs of both foreigners and locals in the region.

CM: How did your family cope with living in another country?

TSH: Northwest China is very different from coastal or developed cities like Shanghai or Beijing. One thing for sure – all my children enjoyed their sense of space and freedom!

For education, they were enrolled in a local school for half a day. My wife would also do some home school with them to ensure they get their regular dose of English language and Singapore Maths. At secondary school level, the two older boys did full-time online school (so Home-Based Learning (HBL) was not new for them!)

As a family from urban Singapore, we had to adjust to a completely different culture and way of life! Our local friends often dropped by our home unannounced, sometimes even staying overnight. Over the years, we found ourselves shifting from being event or time-oriented towards becoming people-centred. In short, my wife and I have learned to slow down, drink tea, travel light, and live our lives without any plan B.

And when it comes to hospitality, we can never outdo our new neighbours in generosity and kindness! Though less materially well off than us, they never hesitated to make us feel like VIPs as they served us with the choicest portion