President’s Message

The month of November saw the surprising election of Mr Donald Trump as President Elect of USA. None of the pollsters got it right. While the pundits are guessing the likely policies of the new President, we cannot ignore the new world order with the new President. It is all about USA with the USD climbing while the rest of the world are pondering the isolationist Trumpism. The Paris accord on Climate Change and Obamacare with its high cost will certainly be reviewed. TPP might be in hibernation during the Trump’s reign but the rest of the world will continue to find ways out of the Great Recession, mostly by trading and infrastructure spending. The rise of China is already self-evident with the RM 383B development at Iskandar.

Bersih 5 came and went. Private specialists are still struggling with their tax. The various interpretations and the confusion were the reason why we asked LHDN to start the new tax assessment in 2017. As of now, the 9 September 2016 letter stands with the appeal for a 2016 start and is still waiting for an answer. As the deadline for voluntary disclosure is 15 December 2016, members still have time to do the risk management and get the paper trails in order, before deciding on voluntary disclosure. This should not be too difficult as I am sure no doctors have hidden Swiss accounts!

Meanwhile I will report on the two conferences I attended as President of MMA.

Second WVA-WMA Global Conference on One Health

I had the distinct honour of being invited by the Japan Medical Association to attend the Second World Medical Association/World Veterinary Association Global Conference on One Health held 10-11 November 2016 in Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, Japan. The inaugural conference was held in Madrid in 2015, and it was fortuitous that Dr Isao Kurauchi, President of Japan Veterinary Medical Association and Dr Yoshitake Yokokura, President of Japan Medical Association (JMA) both have come from the Fukuoka Prefecture of Japan. The two Presidents having known each other for a long time and decided to bring this important meeting to Fukuoka. Dr Yokokura is the three-term President of JMA and has the distinct honour to be the President Elect of World Medical Association.

This conference brought practitioners of Animal and Human Medicine together to improve global health under the One Health Concept, moving it to the One Health Approach. The Tripartite agreement of WHO/FAO/OIE in 2010 recognised the interaction of animals, human and the environment. The recent outbreaks of zoonotic diseases e.g. Ebola haemorrhagic fever, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Dengue and Zika have undermined the health beyond national boundaries. In recent past, we had Influenza, Nipah virus and EV71.

Two memorable keynote speakers gave me much inspiration. Nobel Laureate in Chemistry 2002 Dr Koichi Tanaka (b.1959) related how he discovered mass spectrometric analyses of biological macromolecules such as proteins in 1985. He was an Electrical Engineer Graduate doing research with Shimadzu. He gave his address before His Royal Highness Prince Akishino, with the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Governor of the Fukuoka Prefecture and the Mayor of Kitakyushu City. There was so much regal and official presence at the conference, underlying the government support for the two Presidents.

The second keynote address was given by Japanese astronaut Mr Mamoru Mohri (first space mission in 1992) who related his experiences in space during a full house public forum. He related his vulnerability in space and realised that only the blue earth can sustain life. This realisation gave rise to the importance of protecting all the natural resources on earth, especially when he could see a small rim of atmosphere from space.

These two pioneers with very different perspectives, one at a micro-chemical level and the other from space with their simplicity, humility and gratitude drew a lot of admiration from the delegates. Ideas do come from unexpected places.
Other highlights were the projects by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Zambia, Kenya and Indonesia on the study of flying foxes involvement with Rabies-related and other viral infectious diseases. The field work together with the laboratories support at Japanese Universities produced a lot of new information.

JICA was also involved in the surveillance of multi-drug resistant bacteria in Vietnam. This showed a 60% presence of ESBL carriage rate as a result of poor hygiene, non-prescription use of antibiotics in animals and human, and how intervention reduced the carriage rate to 35%.

Indeed I am very grateful to JMA for this unique opportunity. It was in Kitakyushu that I had the privilege to meet Dato Dr Quaza Nizamuddin Bin Hassan Nizam and Dr Paul Chelliah, President and Immediate Past President respectively of Veterinary Association of Malaysia. We have agreed to hold joint meetings of One Health in Malaysia to further spread this message. Besides our Veterinarian colleagues, we have to get our Environmental Scientist to enlighten us as well. The water contamination with 4-bromodiphenyl ether (a fire retardant) at Sungai Semenyih, Nilai, Negri Sembilan, the yearly air pollution from the forest fires (haze) , red tides, Lanas rare earth processing plant and a host of other environmental issues should be further studied and highlighted.

I came away inspired by the Japanese culture, the hospitality and the thoughtfulness of my host. The pursuit of knowledge is a value in many successful societies and I can see this is very well supported by the Government of Japan. This is also very much embodied in Chado, the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Through the Way of Tea, proponents seek the principles of Harmony, Respect, Purity and Tranquility. The host was always courteous, respectful and transfers to and fro the airport was very much appreciated.

Antibiotics Awareness Week 2016

The World Antibiotic Awareness Week 14-20 November 2016 aims to raise awareness of the threat of global antibiotic resistance. The launching was done by Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramanian with pledges by Ministry of Health, Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society and Malaysian Medical Association to support all the strategies to address the threat of antimicrobial resistance in Malaysia.

The Antibiotics Awareness Week 2016 was organised under the leadership of Datuk Dr Christopher Lee. The launching was preceded by talks given by Prof Madya Dr Latifah bt Hassan on the One Health Approach to Antimicrobial Resistance, Dato’ Dr Mahiran bt Mustafa on the Emergence of Plasmid Mediated Colistin Resistance (MCR-1), and myself on the Role of GPs in Combating Antimicrobial Resistance.

British economist Jim O’Neil in a report (2014) to the British Parliament said that if left unchecked by 2050, antimicrobial resistance would cost globally 10 million deaths per year, 2-5% decline in GDPs of poor countries, and 100 trillion USD. Many people would be trapped in poverty and suffering in a new apocalyptic era. 28 million people could fall into poverty. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) would mean prolonged ill-health, prolonged hospitalisation and the increased cost of healthcare. Productivity would suffer and global trade would be reduced.

Livestock would also suffer as diseases would be untreatable with AMR. Food sources would be more expensive and the poor would go hungry.

WHO Director General Dr Margaret Chan warned of this end of modern medicine as we know it where a sore throat or a simple scratch on the knee would kill. Joint replacements, transplant and other surgeries would not be safe anymore. Many common infections will again become untreatable.

We need to preserve and to prolong the usefulness of the present antibiotics we still have available. Studies have shown lower resistance if we use less antibiotics. Good Antibiotics Stewardship implies appropriate prescribing, “less is more” approach such as shorter duration, de-escalate among good infection control measures. We have to educate our patients that upper respiratory tract infections are frequently viral which antibiotics will not work.

Malaysia is fortunate as antibiotics is a Prescription Only Medication (POM). We have to ensure that antibiotics remain POM. Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society’s President Amrahi Bin Bang pledged “no prescription, no antibiotics”. Many of our neighbouring countries are not. A recent survey in Vietnam revealed how indiscriminate use of antibiotics both in human and animals resulted in high AMR.

A recent publication “Antibiotic prescribing in public and private practice: a cross-sectional study in primary care clinics in Malaysia” Ab Rahman et al. BMC Infectious Diseases (2016) 16: 208 showed that antibiotics prescribing are high in both sectors in Malaysia. Overall,