

It happened at midnight on 24th August this year.

A fire suddenly broke out in a theater of No 3 People's Hospital affiliated to the Medical College, Shanghai Jiaotong University when surgery in another theater was underway. Present were at least six medical workers, who lost no time in evacuating, deserting the anesthetized patient on the operating table, the amputation surgery unfinished. It was an outrageous tragedy that the patient, having survived a traffic accident, died from smoke-inhalation in hospital.

While appalled on reading this news, I could not help recalling a story of a benevolent doctor who was always willing to help others, even at the expense of his own reputation.

### **Daodin Wang of the Qing Dynasty narrated the following saga.**

Lianfang Wei's father, Wei the Senior was a doctor by occupation. Not only was he versed in the profession, but keen on bounteous deeds as well. He treated his patients with utmost care, whether they were rich or poor, whether they paid him or not. In the case of the destitute, he even provided them with free medicine and monetary donations.

If patients had traveled from remote parts of the country, he would not commence pulse-feeling until they finished the conge or snacks he offered. He would explain to curious people: "Having trudged a long way to the city, they must be hungry and tired. Their pulses are likely in disarray. Only by allowing them to rest whilst they are eating and drinking, will they calm down. I am no philanthropist, rather, a skilled doctor."

On one occasion, a patient, having seen Dr Wei for consultation in his home, found ten taels of silver missing from under his pillow. The son of the patient, confused by someone who spoke evil of Dr Wei, suspected Dr Wei of stealing the silver during the consultation. As the son dared not query Dr Wei, he knelt at the doorstep of Dr Wei, holding a bunch of incense in hand.

Dr Wei, bewildered at the sight, asked: "What are you doing?"

"I have something to ask but dare not raise it for fear of reproach by you, my revered doctor," replied the son.

"Say it. I won't blame you," said Dr Wei.

Therefore the patient's son related what he believed to be the truth.

Upon hearing this, Dr Wei invited the son into a private room and said: "It is true. I did this out of emergency. I had intended to slip it back into where it was during the second consultation

tomorrow. Now that you have raised the issue, I will give it back to you. Take it home. But don't mention it to anyone else. Please!"

With these words, Dr Wei took out the same amount of silver as was stolen and handed the silver over to the son.

Before long, the patient recuperated. He was stunned when he found his original lost silver lying under the quilt while sorting out the dirty linen.

Filled with shame and remorse, he said:" We have lost nothing actually. Why should we slander a revered senior and by doing so, turn ourselves into unrighteous men? We must immediately return the silver to Dr Wei in public so as not to taint his good name."

That said, both father and son hurried to the door step of Dr Wei and knelt with bunches of incense in hands.

The son said: "I have deeply hurt you my revered doctor by believing evil rumors and accusing you wrongly. Why did you, my reverent doctor, opt for acquiescence, for which I feel so shameful? Now that you pardon me for the offense, I venture to ask the reason."

"Your dad and I are from the same country, so I always appreciate him as a man of frugality and industry. When he learnt the loss of ten taels of silver whilst he was ill, the situation would certainly get worse, even to the point of him being never able to recover. That is why I preferred to do what I did. Once your father recovered the missing sliver, he would be in a happy mood, which would put him onto a natural course of recuperation," smiled Dr Wei.

Upon hearing these kind words, the patient led his son to kneel down and kowtowed, saying: "Thank you our revered doctor for saving my life at the expense of your good reputation. I will serve you as your dog in my hereafter life to repay you for your great benefaction to me." Dr Wei invited the father and the son to his house and entertained them with a rich dinner. The story concludes with a happy ending.

This saga reminds me of the virtue of doctors in the Chinese medical tradition, among which, putting humans at the forefront and respecting human life are the most prominent feature and fundamental in forming its ideological basis.

An individual's moral integrity and standards of a society are best measured and tested by the choice that an individual makes in the face of an emergency.

The sinking of the Titanic in the 19th century left 1502 dead and saw 705 lucky ones survive – all women and children. The elite and the millionaires on board the ship offered the chance of survival to the weak and underprivileged while facing the prospect of themselves perishing in the icy water. Mr. Guggenheim who came from a long line of bankers wrote on a note for his wife:" No female will be left on the deck because of my occupation of a seat in the life boat. I will

not die an animal but a real man!”

It is not just in some Chinese medical circles where ethics and conscience have been passed into oblivion. The whole society has been permeated with a miasma of social malady. It is no use whinging and crying about such a reality. We must identify the underlying cause first – why, how and by whom the thousand-year-long Chinese tradition, culture and ethics are being blighted. Mulling over history and tracking down to our origin would be the starting point from where we can contemplate rebuilding and restoring our traditional moral value as well as over the returning to a time of universal human benevolence.

*Translated from original Chinese article on Renminbao.*