

# To live well, change how we view medical care

FROM **PATRICK KEE**

I refer to the report “Doctors, nurses feel training in hospice palliative care insufficient: Survey” (June 19). It is indeed sad that some doctors avoid the subject of palliative care as patients and their families would think they are giving up on treatment.

A giant step towards the care of the dying in Singapore was taken when a group of volunteers founded the Hospice Care Association in 1989. This was in response to the dehumanisation of medicine with technological



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advances in medical care. The focus in medicine had shifted from care of patients to cure of diseases.

Hospice care is not about a place or a way to help a patient die peacefully. It is a philosophy of care that is focused on helping patients live as fully as possible until they die.

Hospice care is not about dying; it is about facing death so we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Unfortunately, hospice care has become medicalised with the term “palliative care”. While we need medical staff trained in palliative care, the urgent

problem is exposing our doctors and nurses to the reality of death and dying as well as the principle of hospice care. One of the most important lessons the dying can teach us is to learn how to die well and live well. Too often, we fill our todays regretting the past or worrying about the future.

Medicine is an idol with clay feet — an idol we must learn to discard. The sooner we learn how to use medicine not to add years to our lives, but life to our years, the easier it will be to solve the issue of the spiralling cost of medical care. We will no longer be enslaved by the fear of death, but be freed to live more fully in the face of death.