A GUIDE TO A LONG LIFE

One clinic day, about 10 years ago, a 45-year-old man came to see me. Here's how our conversation went:

Patient: Doc, I want to live long. What shall I do?
Me: How long do you want to live?
Patient: About 100? Is this possible?
Me: Amused, I managed to keep my patient deadpan as I told him, "God willing, you, setting aside your risk for accidental death, you need to learn and practice healthy living."

He was very curious about the onset and complications of not only cardiovascular disease (CVD), but also cancer, diabetes and other debilitating diseases that may lead to premature death.

I used a holistic approach. I made him understand practically everything that affects longevity with sound anecdotal and evidence-based testimonials.

I made him realize the relevance of 3 elements—heredity, lifestyle and personal values—to longevity.

My advice:
1. Dig into your family lineage to know the diseases that afflicted your parents, grandparents and siblings, and your parents' lifestyles prior to your conception and after you were born. Your parents' lifestyle is not your lifestyle, but it will affect your genes. If you come from a family with CVD (heart and blood vessel diseases), diabetes and hypertension, your risk of acquiring it is already in your blood.
2. Fill your baseline understanding of health and getting sick.
3. Check if your lifestyle is good or bad to avoid premature death.

Awareness is very essential to know your risks and options. Everyone has non-modifiable (family history, age, and sex) and modifiable risk factors (obesity, smoking, high cholesterol, physical inactivity).

A lot of my patients don't know their parents' cause of death. Most of them answer me with "I don't know. What I remember was the doctor said it was cardiac arrest."

You owe it to yourself and to your parents to know the facts.

Men are more prone to CV diseases than women because the latter are being protected by their estrogen hormones. However, recent studies showed that women after menopause stopped producing estrogen and that is why they catch up with men.

Know and control your weaknesses so you can stop CVD. You have all the time and means to prevent it.

Self-empowerment means "you know" and sharing accountability with a health expert in the best attitude. There are many sources of information available like the www.philheart.org (the official website of the Philippine Heart Association), health magazines, lay symposium, and your doctors. It pays to ask questions and read a lot. Don't deny yourself the privilege of grabbing all the vital information from your doctors. It is the doctor's responsibility to educate and enlighten you. Don't leave his clinic with doubts. You have to be satisfied.

Now, back to my inquisitive patient. At 55, he is the epitome of a golden boy in the pink of health.

Ten years ago, I prescribed him a set of general guidelines on how to achieve his mission —55 years more of quality life of adding life to living.

The guide was quite long, but simple. But he followed it and the most important thing is he adhered to it.

Now, seeing this dutiful patient of mine, active and fit, warms my heart.

In my next column, I will share with you the said guidelines. My idea is one guide per issue and hopefully, I will be able to walk you through life without heart disease.

True or False:
Every patient has non-modifiable (family history, age, sex) and modifiable risk factors (obesity, smoking, high cholesterol, physical inactivity) for cardiovascular disease.

Email your answer and/or suggest a topic of interest for our column to heartline.philheartassoc@yahoo.com and get a chance to win a brand new Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition.

Congratulations to Joaquin Ong for correctly answering our previous trivia question.

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Heartline is an initiative of the PHA with global health care company MSD to their shared commitment to raise awareness on heart diseases and related illnesses. For more information, visit the PHA website at www.philheart.org.