

EDITOR'S PAGE

Teammates

We were driving from the hospital to the lab to do some experiments and talking about the many such experiences we had shared in the past. She asked if I ever thought about slowing down and doing something else. I confessed that as the years went by I increasingly thought of spending less time working and more time “playing” with my wife and family. It was then that she turned and told me she had the same thoughts, and with the recent retirement of her husband, had decided to move toward retirement herself. Although I always knew that the day would come, it had now arrived. Oi Ling Kwan was planning to end her career in ultrasound, a move that would break up our team. The episode stimulated me to look back and reflect on the role of teammates in medicine, and the incredibly important contribution that having partners had made to me, and most likely had made to nearly all physicians.

It was nearly 35 years ago that Oi Ling and I had begun to work together. Cardiac ultrasound was still in its earliest days, and we were building an echo program at UC Davis while Oi Ling was seeking to increase her skills and be involved in research. We came together as a team almost immediately, and began to collaborate both in delivering clinical services and advancing the field. She was indefatigable, meticulous, innovative, but most importantly, invariably cheerful. Working hours had no meaning, and we were just having fun. When I decided to relocate to Kentucky, I was overjoyed to learn that Oi Ling was not only willing, but desirous of coming as well. As time went on it became apparent that some of the opportunities that we had to collaborate with academia and industry were related to her as much as to me. When she met her husband Roger, he graciously agreed to “share” her with me, and one of my fondest memories is walking her down the aisle at their wedding. When I decided to relocate yet again to San Diego, it was contingent upon the team staying together. Although the demands of our positions have drawn us apart a bit, the *Journal* for me and administration for Oi Ling, there are still relatively few things that I do that do not draw on her talent.

It was in Kentucky that we met the third member of the team. Although she maintains that no one else would take the job, it was clear that Kate Greathouse was an unusually talented person, and both Oi Ling and I recruited her over 25 years ago. Over these years, Kate has been more than an administrative assistant, she has almost become one of the family. We together planned the celebration of my 40th wedding anniversary. Again, evenings and weekends had no special significance if there was work to be done. Our activities included not only those for the universities, but also for professional societies and in running medical meetings, and extended to social as well as professional events. I rapidly became dependent upon her organizational skills, and she has saved me from embarrassing calendar conflicts and inability to find filed documents. When I moved to San Diego, Kate was part of the process from the beginning. The crucial importance of her role is evidenced by the reduction in my productivity when she is absent or on vacation.



**Anthony N. DeMaria,
MD**

*Editor-in-Chief, Journal
of the American College
of Cardiology*

*I believe that
teammates play a
critical role in the
efforts of almost all
physicians.*

Vicki Nasser, our nurse coordinator, is a relative neophyte by the standards of our team, being with us just under 10 years. However, her contributions have been likewise immense. Blessed with a warm and cheerful personality, her extensive experience in cardiology is a great resource. Her interactions with patients are confident and comforting, and she serves as a perfect conduit between them and me. I would be hard put to be able to carry on a clinical practice without her.

One thing should be clear from the foregoing—employer–employee designations have little or no significance in the relationships described. While the bulk of our interactions occur in the course of work, it is in the context of full partnership. Of equal importance, the relationship extends far beyond the workplace and the status of coworkers. The team is more like an extended family. When Oi Ling retires I will lose more than a professional colleague, I will lose a best friend and confidant.

All in all, I have been very fortunate to have excellent partners to join me throughout my career. They have enabled me to accomplish much more than I could have as

an individual. Along with the support of my family, they are majorly responsible for any success that I may have achieved. However, I do not think that I am unique in this experience. In fact, I believe that teammates play a critical role in the efforts of almost all physicians. They typically function so smoothly and unobtrusively, that their contributions often go unnoticed. Frequently, recognition of their importance occurs only when they are absent. Perhaps it is the impending absence of Oi Ling that has provoked this Editor's Page. However, if all this essay serves to accomplish is to give some overdue thanks to my teammates and stimulates other physicians to similarly recognize their own, it will have been a worthwhile exercise.

Address correspondence to:

Dr. Anthony N. DeMaria
Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*
3655 Nobel Drive, Suite 630
San Diego, California 92112
E-mail: ademaria@acc.org