

but through negotiations and re-engineering, it has been possible so far without demoralizing all the practitioners. In the United States, it is possible to provide more comprehensive care for patients in the clinic environment than it is in Canada. In our clinic, we do minor surgeries, vasectomies, splints, casts, sigmoidoscopies, and coloscopies. I find it challenging and satisfying to provide a range of family practice services in outpatient care.

My biggest frustration practising in the United States is the increased paperwork. The documentation required for insurance, billing, and medical and legal reasons is much more detailed. There are many more reports and forms to complete. The health care system here is imperfect and fragmented, with some problems in common with the Canadian system. I wish all patients here had health care coverage.

I hope soon that will be possible here without following the Canadian example of a single-payor system with draconian powers over all practitioners.

— *Richard H. Binder, MD, CCFP, ABFP*
Longview, Wash

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Spiritual interventions in Bali

Bali is a small Hindu island of almost 3 million people in Indonesia, one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. The Balinese are unique in the way they integrate religious festivals and celebrations into every aspect of daily life. Most ceremonies of the cycles of life, such as births, marriages, birthdays, and prayers for the sick, take place in the family temple situated in every home.

One of the unique and most interesting groups of celebrations are called "tumpeks." These are special days set aside to honour inanimate objects, secular articles of culture, and animals. For example, on certain days twice a year, offerings are made to all weapons, such as swords, daggers, and spears. Other tumpeks honour trees; articles of culture, such as instruments, masks, puppets, and dance paraphernalia; jewellery and objects of gold, silver, and precious stones; and even common animals.

I was fortunate to be in Bali on a day devoted to Saraswati, Goddess of Wisdom. Special prayers are said regarding learning, education, and books. On this day, theoretically, people are not supposed to read or write. Students gather at temples all over the island to ask Saraswati for success in their studies, and special ceremonies are held at schools and

libraries. Everyone offers thanks for the books they own and for the privilege of learning.

Special prayers

I was invited by the Vice Rector, Dr I.B. Tjitarsa, former dean of the medical school, to visit Udayana University and say special prayers at the temple on the newly built campus. We sat in front of the altar, lit incense, and then, with flowers in our hands, uttered a series of three prayers. Afterward, holy water that had been blessed by a priest was sprinkled over us. Offerings were then placed on the altar to the Goddess Saraswati.

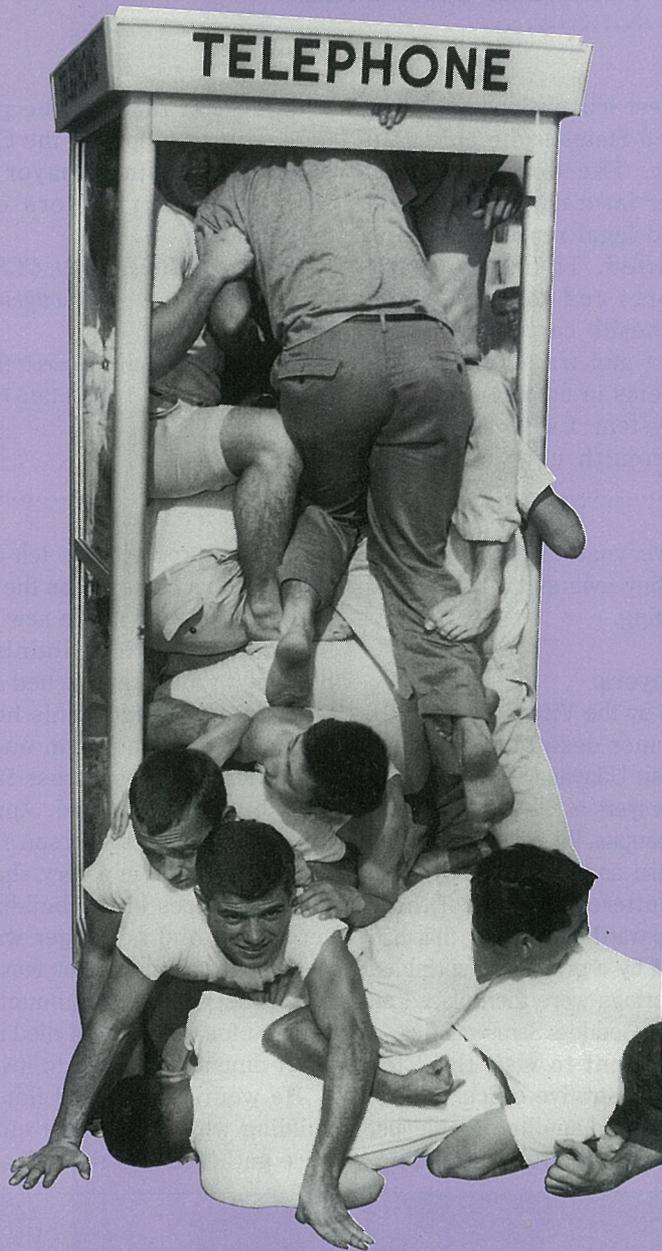
Then we went to visit the Vice Rector's administrative office, and on the way we passed another temple just outside the administrative building.

Dr Tjitarsa proceeded to tell an amazing story that occurred on the first day he was on the job at the new campus. As he entered the administration building, a man approached him and told him they needed his help. The day before, a man from one of the third floor offices across from the main building had died. Apparently this was the fourth person from the third floor to die in a very short time. The employees in the building were very upset and no longer wanted to work in that building for fear of their lives. The Vice Rector thought it was odd that four people had died in such a short time and decided to investigate.

He went to the third floor of the building where the upset employees were gathered and noticed a woman



Spiritual aspect of life: Prayers give thanks in a temple at the University of Udayana in Bali.



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crying in the middle of a large room all by herself. As he approached her she went into a trance and began speaking in a man's voice. The Vice Rector was astounded but listened carefully as the voice began to tell him about the ancient temple that was adjacent to the building. Evidently it was not being kept properly. The voice lamented that it was run down, and no one was bringing offerings to it any more. The spirit said that, if things were not improved, then up to 11 people would die. The Vice Rector was concerned and asked what could be done. The voice gave instructions on how to avoid the calamity.

Appeasing the gods

A washroom had been built facing the temple, and this was disrespectful. A wall must be put around the temple separating it from the washroom and everything else. Second, new cloth should be wrapped around the temple statues because the old holy cloth had holes. Third, offerings and holy water must be brought to the temple daily. Finally, the new temple that had been built on campus was not being taken care of, and people were not praying there and bringing offerings. This had to change. The voice said that child creatures from the underworld lived under the new temple and that candies should be brought to appease them. The Vice Rector had the instructions written down and made sure they were carried out.

To his amazement, once the recommendations were followed, the atmosphere on campus changed. Up until that time there had been much unrest. People were quarrelling, and students were organizing marches and protests almost every week. After the instructions were carried out, the protests stopped, and people seemed happier. It was interesting to hear this story with its spiritual dimensions being told by a conservative medical doctor.

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Saraswati prayers

Dr Tjitarsa then took us back to his house where we participated in the Saraswati prayers at the temple in his house. Books were placed on the altar, and special prayers were said. Afterward we watched a ceremony to honour his new car. Before you drive a new car, you must perform a special rite giving offerings, saying prayers, and blessing the car with holy water. Then the car becomes a "living thing" with a soul. From that day forward, the car would be blessed every 6 months. Also during the tumpek honouring all metal objects, the car would be included in the prayers.

By setting aside a special day twice a year to honour books and learning, the Balinese show their respect and high regard for knowledge and literature. Aspects of life that are often taken for granted become special and are given reverence. They take the mundane and elevate it to a level of celebration, giving thanks for every aspect of their life.

Many argue that attention to ritual, strong family orientation, and spiritual awareness will help the Balinese culture survive. Bali, more than any other place I have been, keeps the spiritual aspect of existence a vibrant part of daily life.

—Mel Borins, MD, CCFP

Dr Borins, a Fellow of the College, is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto and is on active staff at St Joseph's Health Centre.

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Dressed for the occasion: Dr Borins's family wears ceremonial dress in order to visit a Balinese temple to participate in Saraswati.



Car with a soul: Dr Tjitarsa and his wife perform a special rite for their new car by giving offerings, saying prayers, and blessing the car with holy water.