

Being Human

Stories from Family Medicine

Second Edition

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the College

Cheong Pak Yean & Ong Chooi Peng
Editors



- The *Table of Contents* is on Pages iv and v -

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Edited by Cheong Pak Yean & Ong Chooi Peng

Text by Family Physicians

Drawings by Medical Students of Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine,
National University of Singapore

A Publication of the



COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS
SINGAPORE

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College of Medicine Building
16 College Road, #01-02, Singapore 169854
Tel: (65) 6223 0606
Fax: (65) 6222 0204
www.cfps.org.sg

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Book design by Yiling Liw
yilingliw@outlook.com

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The cover photograph shows a riot of zinnias in a late summer garden. The blooms are glorious in their colours and messy in their bed. Life is glorious and messy too. We hope this book reflects a bit of that.

50th Anniversary of College of Family Physicians Singapore Stamp Set (CSK21AST)

The stamps are part of a commemorative local issue released in July 2021 and are reprinted with permission. They showcase family physicians' many roles across multiple settings. We are proud to be part of this jumble.

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Cheong Pak Yean, Ong Chooi Peng

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Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the forty-three doctors who have willingly shared their reflections and experiences. The great majority of them are family physicians, and the couple who are not have been closely connected to the Family Medicine fraternity.

The drawings in this book were produced by successive cohorts of medical students participating in the *Pictures from the Frontline* workshops from 2012 to 2017. We are grateful that they have been generous with their work. Fong Seng was head of the Family Medicine division during those years and his support sustained the workshops. And Joon Sin, in his final year of medical school, kindly took time to help us communicate with the different classes of students.

We also acknowledge Lee Gan, old friend and mentor, for his ideas that helped to conceptualise this book. Our old compact to sharpen each other remains a compact for learning and support to this day.

Tze Lee and the College secretariat have undertaken much of the work in getting this book to publication. We have been comrades in yet another foray.

For the second edition, we are delighted to present a poem by Kirpal, as a non-medical commentary on the work that we do. We are also especially glad to close the book with two cartoons by one of our pioneers. Readers will quickly recognize them as wry medical commentaries on the work that we do!

Lastly, we gladly acknowledge our families and our patients, who have journeyed with us from the time we were young practitioners, and have seen us grow into our grey hairs. They have helped shape who we are.

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Message

Looking back, looking ahead

I am truly honored and privileged to be part of this fraternity of family physicians. This book puts together many bite-sized stories, anecdotes, and reflections to remember how far our community has come. We get to see different aspects of health care delivery, and the ideas and aspirations of the contributors provide an insightful glimpse into their lived experiences.

2021 is also the year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the College of Family Physicians Singapore.

This is a good time to remind ourselves of the contributions of the founding stalwarts of the College. Doctors Sreenivasan, Wong Heck Sing, Victor Fernandez, Koh Eng Kheng, and Lee Suan Yew laid the foundation that succeeding generations of family physicians built upon to create the suite of training programs we have today within the College.

We have so much more to do in training future generations of family physicians and in honing their skillsets and expertise to deal with our rapidly ageing population and their changing care needs. My wish is that College will build upon the foundation of the past fifty years and, in the next fifty years, forge ahead into broader partnerships with academia, practising physicians, and patients.

Congratulations!

Dr Tan See Leng
Minister for Manpower and 2nd Minister for Trade and Industry
September 2021



Foreword

As the College celebrates World Family Doctor Day 2022, it is our honor to present the e-version of *Being Human: Stories from Family Medicine*.

This is a book that has been long in the making. Based on a series of drawings by third-year medical students, it is a collection of seventy-two sets of essays by forty-three experienced family physicians and specialists.

The book explores various aspects of the human condition in the practice of medicine in five sections. *The Doctor and the Patient* looks at the doctor-patient relationship and all it entails. *Challenges to Care* highlights some of the difficulties we face in providing care – fragmentation, fear of treatment, the not-my-business syndrome etc. *Family and Sexuality* deals with some topics we do not often openly discuss. We are all very comfortable talking about family, but not so with sexual issues!

Being Human is all about our human condition, and the vignettes plumb the depths of the therapeutic relationship. There is a bittersweet lesson on every page. The last section, *In Practice*, deals with the realities of working as a doctor. From the business of running a practice, to self-care and the pressures of balancing work and family, the various stories touch on much of medicine that doesn't make the headlines but affects us all profoundly.

Enjoy the book for what it is: a window into the medical experience through the eyes of young exuberant medical students, an exposé by senior practitioners who have seen more, and a celebration of the beauty and humanity of medicine.

Adj Assoc Prof Tan Tze Lee
President, College of Family Physicians Singapore



Being Human

means trying to fathom.
love features
among the myriad images
turning and twisting
minds roaming, wandering.

we settle and pause.

writing turns to poetry
and prose awaits attention
as the lesser of two twins.

being human means
giving oneself a chance
to reboot and re-boost.
the blood in the veins
forms remembrances
deep feelings and thoughts
as our being, frail and fraught,
tested and feasted and rested
finds its locus, settles
amidst comforting memories.

time passes and may heal
wounds implanted and minded.
sorrow upon sorrow, and
joy unto joy rejoicing
the triumph of bonding.

the above – a riddle for our medics.
so continues the elixir quest
as op. after op. after op.
challenges and taunts
new frontiers.
and new cures.

— Kirpal Singh
april 2021

writer, poet, critic, thinker



Preface

This book is the work of a fraternity.

Family Medicine is a privilege. It is the discipline that allows us the most intimate glimpse into the lives of our patients over a lifetime.

For medical students, the glimpse begins in earnest in the third year of medical school, with the Family Medicine posting. These students have contributed their observations of family practice over a succession of cohorts. Following on that, practising family physicians have reflected on the drawings that they found meaningful, and added insight that the years have allowed them. The editors did not impose a structure or suggest a slant to these reflections.

This book, then, combines the fresh strokes of beginning practitioners with the lines of seasoned artists, and together we have a lovely picture. It has been our privilege to be family physicians and to be part of this work.

This is a special year for our fraternity. We are proud and grateful to celebrate the fiftieth year of the College in 2021, and we are unabashedly glad to present this e-edition in honor of the milestone.

Cheong Pak Yean & Ong Chooi Peng
Editors

