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Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) course

This programme was first mooted by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, and was started in the year 2000. The GDFM course is designed to equip trainees with the minimum vocational skills for independent family practice. It is a rigorous 2-year course, comprising 8 quarterly modules, including distance learning and workshops, with 5 skills courses and 8 small group tutorials. Successful graduates from the course, can register with the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) and display their GDFM title. The Ministry of Health and SMC also recognize this designation for entry into the Register of Family Physicians. The GDFM is therefore the minimum requirement to qualify as a Family Physician in Singapore.

Master of Medicine (Family Medicine), College Programme

The M.Med (Family Medicine) College Programme, was started in 1993, though the foundation for this was laid much earlier by Dr Lee Suan Yew and A/Prof Goh Lee Gan. Prior to 2011 when the Family Medicine Residency took over Programme A, this course was known as "Programme B." This course continues today as the "College Programme" giving post-government bond doctors the option to further their training. This programme seeks to equip trainees with skills and knowledge beyond the needs of a competent Family Physician, and is pegged at specialist level. Trainees are also taught on how to be clinical leaders to other junior doctors. Presently, the M.Med (Family Medicine) qualification is being accepted as a de facto specialist degree in our local healthcare institutions, and there is increasing recognition by other overseas institutions.

Family Medicine Fellowship Programme (FMFP)

The FMFP was first started in 1998, and represents the pinnacle

of training for Family Physicians in Singapore. It is the equivalent exit qualification for our specialty. The programme is a rigorous 2-year programme covering various aspects of Family Medicine such as clinical course work, bio-medical ethics, teaching and research. The objective being to provide advanced training in Family Medicine to Family Physicians who at the end of the process should become an expert clinician, leader, teacher and scholar. Currently, the FCFP(S) designation is a requirement for promotion to senior grades by many institutions. FCFP(S) is also recognised by the Academy of Medicine Singapore, and holders of this qualification can be admitted as Fellows of the Academy, just like all other specialists. Even if you were in private general practice in the heartlands, attaining the FCFP(S) is still a good measure of personal professional satisfaction.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, every General Practitioner – Family Physician matters. As more and more of us become higher and highly qualified, we would gain greater and greater public trust and regard from other specialist colleagues. This trust would also extend to the government and our key partners in the Ministry of Health. Indeed, I can tell all that MOH wonders if the entire body of GPs are sufficiently well trained to take on chronic care, as I understand from the sub-committee College has sent me to. One answer to this is for us all, including us in the heartland GP clinics, to be highly trained. In that way, our policy makers can have better ease of mind, when they deploy tax payers' monies to help us care for our patients better. And of course, that personal satisfaction that I (we) have completed all the required Family Medicine training. Do discern your call, and consider signing up to one of these programmes next year.

■ CM

Perm Secretary visits CFPS

by Dr Chan Hian Hui Vincent, FCFP(S), Council Member, College of Family Physicians Singapore
Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Council Member, Editor, College of Family Physicians Singapore

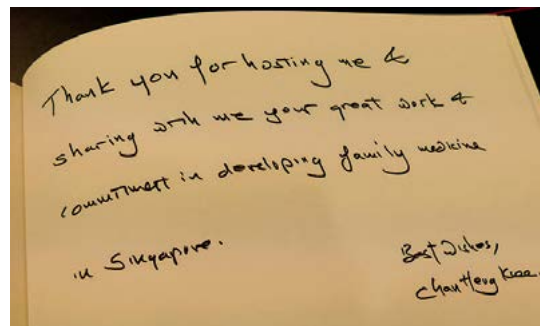
Signalling his keen interest to understand the Family Medicine scene in Singapore, Mr Chan Heng Kee (the new Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Health) visited our College of Family Physicians Singapore on 18 August 2016. He was warmly received by our council, led by A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock and Vice-President Dr Tan Tze Lee. Members of council representing our Family Medicine fraternity across the various healthcare settings were also present.

The visit began as Mr Chan signed our guest book after a short tour of our premises. A/Prof Lee then gave an introduction into the history of our College, from its founding in 1971, to the development of her various academic programmes and the hosting of 2 WONCA World Conferences in 1983 and 2007, among other achievements.



Mr Chan Heng Kee, new MOH Permanent Secretary, signing our guest book. He was accompanied by Dr Elaine Tan (fifth from right), Head of the MOH Primary and Community Care division.

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Dr Paul Goh, our Censor-in-chief then briefed Mr Chan on the various academic programmes organised by College. These include the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) course, the M.Med (Family Medicine) College Programme and the Fellowship Training Programme. He highlighted that our programmes are recognised internationally. One example being the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners recognising our FCFP(S) designation as being on par with their FRACGP.

Council then had a chit chat with Permanent Secretary about Family Medicine matters in Singapore. We expressed happiness that MOH is increasingly engaging and consulting with General Practitioners in the community. Topics such as CHAS, daily clinic practice in the various health care settings and better recognition for Family Physicians with higher qualifications were also brought up. College also briefed about Family Medicine teaching, and how we plan, conduct and organise our programmes. In particular,

we are proud of our system of “reservist” Family Medicine teachers. Though we also need a strong “regular core”, to quote A/Prof Lee. Here, we asked if MOH can consider providing us some resources for our teaching programmes.

Being “one fraternity in many settings”, we expressed confidence in our programmes in preparing our trainees for work across all our Family Medicine health care settings. However, progress is a continuous process, and we are still continually striving to improve on our courses. Hence more resources would aid in this regard.

Hearing that Mr Chan had spent his National Day public holiday advocating for Family Medicine, we are assured that our new MOH Permanent Secretary knows and feels the importance of Family Medicine along with the complexity of daily clinical practice, in fulfilling Singapore’s healthcare needs. We are thus confident that the partnership between MOH and CFPS will continue to grow in strength, as we strive to serve our patients and Singapore better.

■ CM

The Fellowship Journey

by Dr Ong Cong Wei Alvin, MCFP(S), Council Member, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Life is a journey of experiences. On a similar note, so is the experience of the fellowship training, which forms part of the formative training journey of each family physician that embarks on it.

The Fellowship Programme [FCFP(S)], is an advanced 24-month Family Medicine training programme, to prepare and empower the trainee to become a competent consultant family physician.

Prior to signing up for this course, I had my reservations and fear if I would be able to cope with the commitments of the programme, taking in consideration of the need for simultaneous juggling of commitments from work and family.

However, I deliberated on my primary reasons for wanting to pursue this course. I have wanted to advance my knowledge and competency in my practice as a family physician. Moreover, I have also wanted to gain more experience and training in the area of research skills, medical writing as well as evidence based reviews.

The 2 years of training were intensive and covered a wide range of objectives. Quite a number of trainees including myself had little prior training as well as exposure to components such as research skills and evidence-based reviews. Thus the learning curve can be rather steep for those who are new to this field. However, one of the advantages of learning together in a big group was the ability to tap on the strengths of one another and mutual coaching to ensure that no one is left behind in this learning journey.

Our fellowship cohort had one of the largest numbers of trainees. We also had a good mix of trainees from varied practice settings, work experiences as well as seniority. Our learning sessions were very interactive and enjoyable. Each of us also brought along and shared different experiences and strengths. Our group shared many moments of laughter, joy, delicious food as well as times of challenges and difficult moments during our learning journey. One of the highlights of our cohort’s teamwork was demonstrated through the organisation of the Family Medicine Teacher’s Conference in 2015. During the preparation as well as conduct of the event proper, each trainee contributed significantly to the success of this pedagogy workshop.