

Quo Vadis, Singapore FM?

Interviewed by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, Past President, College of Family Physicians Singapore

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan (GLG) received the SMA Honorary Membership Award at the 2017 SMA Annual Dinner on 6th May 2017 from Minister Gan Kim Yong and President SMA Dr Wong Tien Hua. In my citation of him as a worthy recipient of this award, I spoke of GLG as a composite of three areas of achievement — servant-leader, academic-teacher, and physician-healer. The citation I gave would be reported in the June issue of the SMA-News. In this College Mirror (CM) interview, I sought GLG views about how he views Family Medicine (FM) in Singapore going forward.

Diploma (GDFM), Masters (MMed FM), FM Residency, and the College Fellowship (FCFP), the de facto FM Specialist Training Program.

Thanks are due to the huge numbers of Family Physicians, and Hospital Specialists who] contributed generously in terms of time and energy, to the development of FM to what it is today. Thanks are also due to our colleagues and Government leaders in the Ministry of Health through the years for their support and encouragement. Indeed, our Health Minister, Mr Gan Kim Yong and his fellow Ministers, Permanent Secretary for Health, and the Director of Medical Services, Professor Benjamin Ong, all continue to inspire the development of FM as a major contributor to the Health and well-being of our Singaporeans.

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean (CPY):

Congratulations, Lee Gan - once again on your SMA award.

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan (GLG):

Thank you, Pak Yean, for that citation. It is glorious. Well, I am a little amazed myself at the amount of things that I did. I supposed the most important was I enjoyed it, even though it was often not easy. The things achieved were meaningful to me.

CPY:

Could you elaborate on your experience in developing FM in Singapore?

GLG:

Right - perhaps I start with National University of Singapore (NUS) adoption of FM as a medical discipline in Singapore. There were several key supporters of this: Professor Edward Tock, then the Dean of the Medical School; Dr Lee Suan Yew, then the College President; Professor Phoon Wai On, then Head of Social Medicine & Public Health (SMPH); and my classmate Prof Lee Hin Peng. He became the subsequent first Head of COFM, the name given to the new Community, Occupational & Family Medicine Department.

Thirty years have passed since the setting up of this Department on 13 Feb 1987 in NUS. I am proud that in the 3 decades, the whole structure and system of FM training from undergraduate to postgraduate, is now in place. Our FM postgraduate training encompasses the Graduate



A/Prof Goh Lee Gan (left) receiving the SMA Honorary Membership Award from Minister Gan Kim Yong (centre) and Dr Wong Tien Hua (right)

Image courtesy of SMA

I am proud to play the role of the midwife - to make sure the discipline is delivered viable and robust. FM training structure today is healthy and broad based. All the three medical schools each have a robust undergraduate programme. There are FM Residency programmes in all three hospital clusters. The College runs the College programme leading to MMed FM and also the FM Fellowship programme leading to the FCFP exit certification.

The details of this 30-year journey is captured in a video clip presented at the dinner on 25 February 2017 celebrating the setting up of FM in NUS, way back on 13 February, 1987.

CPY:

In that 30th Anniversary dinner, the Permanent Secretary for Health Mr Chan Heng Kee spoke on numbers and settings for FM. How do you see FM as "one discipline in many settings" impacting on FM role in the health care system in the next few years?

GLG:

Yes, I think this is a practical vision statement for FM practitioners in today's Singapore. With the ageing of the Singapore population, and the consequent co-occurrence of two or more chronic diseases in many elderly persons,

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At the 2017 Annual SMA Dinner. (From left: A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Dr Tan See Leng and A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock)

the norm would be patients requiring care that is not just disease focused but also person-centered. Family physicians being both disease and person centred, are therefore in demand not only in the community but also in acute settings, in community hospitals, in long-term care, and in also in end-of-life care.

CPY:

So that brings me to the question: "Quo Vadis FM, thirty years on?"

GLG:

We need to do several things.

Firstly, we have to continue to promote the vision statement to FM physicians, the public, policy makers and also encourage the press to help us promote the adoption of such a vision.

Secondly, we have to promote multi-disciplinary team care with FM, hospital specialists, nursing, and allied health as team members.

The third is to promote better health literacy in our people to be able to provide self-care, to make appropriate decisions based on informed choice, and to use health services optimally. Only with this will we be able to optimize the use of our scarce resources. FM practitioners need to play a big role in this.

CPY:

The last question - I see that you also spent a fair bit of your time on the regional and international stage to promote FM. How has that played out?

GLG:

Yes. I find regional and international connections beneficial, enlightening, inspiring, and satisfying. We learnt a lot of FM content, practice, ethos, pedagogy, and training skills by sharing, exchanging, and promoting what are best practices. We pay forward. We create a system of supporting FM resources across the world to expose our younger FM generations to both disease focussed and also person centred care.

I participated in training of our FM counterparts in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan. I went as far south as Fiji several years ago. It was hard work but satisfying.

Good to say that exactly 20 years, a delegation of our family physicians - yourself and Dr Julian Lim included – visited Myanmar to acquaint their leaders about our FM undergraduate and postgraduate training. FM as a discipline was then new to them. We subsequently facilitated study trips to Singapore after that for their family doctors to learn our system.

I understand that in a national meeting that took place in early May this year, the current Health Minister there announced the setting up of Departments of Family Medicine in the various universities, the revamp of their Diploma in Family Medicine and the starting of a Master programme in Family Medicine. We are glad that we played a small igniting role in those early years.

(CM: The FM development in Myanmar would be reported in the next issue of the College Mirror)

CPY:

Thanks Lee Gan, for your thoughts. Your SMA award is something that the whole FM Fraternity is really proud of.

GLG:

Thanks, Pak Yean — for your kind words.



▲ (From left) Singaporean FPs Julian Lim, Wong Tien Hua, Cheong Pak Yean and Goh Lee Gan enjoying 'Tau Huay' on 21st street at Yangon, Myanmar in 2005 with Dr Win Lwin Thein, (standing between A/Profs Cheong and Goh) now Vice-President General Practice Society, Myanmar.

■ CM