

Overcoming all odds and executing the impossible with College Secretariat...

all part and parcel of being the Executive Director

Interviewed by Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Hon. Treasurer, Chief Editor



Appreciation dinner for Dr Tham Tat Yean (third from left), together with the ExCo and immediate past president of CFPS, A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock (fourth from left).



President of CFPS, Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee (left) presents a gift of appreciation to Dr Tham Tat Yean.

The success of College and her achievements were never achieved overnight, but over many generations of executive directors (ED) who have done good work, with strong support from the Secretariat! 2018 sees the hand over from Dr Tham Tat Yean (TTY) to Dr Jonathan Pang (JP). College Mirror (CM) goes undercover to uncover what makes both our good men tick, and what we can look forward to with this handing over of the baton!

CM touches base with Dr Tham first to know more about the man who served his term from 2014 – 2017.

College Mirror (CM):

Hi Dr Tham, you have done a lot for College during your term of office as executive director! Can we get you to share some of your contributions for the benefit of our readers?

Dr Tham Tat Yean (TTY):

I was ED for 4 years, from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2017. I am humbled by the fact that my contribution as ED pales in comparison to my predecessors over the years – they are Lee Kheng Hock, Cheng Heng Lee and Jonathan Pang. I therefore do not think that I have done a lot.

In reality, I was merely building upon the good work and foundation that my predecessors had laid down. One of the key areas that I focused during my tenure was to revamp the human resources policy and staff career planning of our College Secretariat. Although College has a small secretariat, my view has always been that their role is particularly crucial in ensuring College's vision and mission are executed properly. College Council is made up of

dedicated individuals who volunteer their time while the ED position is a part-time appointment. This means the success of College's operations depend greatly on how the Secretariat implements its tasks and activities with limited supervision. I believed strongly we needed a good core Secretariat team that is loyal, well trained and empowered to carry out College's mission. The other area that I spent some time reviewing was the policies and procedures in our Secretariat. As our operations grew in scale, these policies and procedures had to evolve to meet the changing business environment and needs of our organisation.

CM:

What were some of the challenges that you faced?

TTY:

The main challenge is that the Secretariat can be better led and managed by a full-time ED. Historically, our College EDs have been part-time appointments and that causes some constraints on the oversight and leadership of the Secretariat by the ED. Nevertheless, College has been able to mitigate this to a certain extent with a relatively well-organised Secretariat team.

CM:

Who were some of your better allies and how have they helped?

TTY:

College had a foundation of good working relationship with the Singapore Medical Association and the Academy of Medicine Singapore. This has led to a healthy collegiality between the Councils of the 3 professional bodies. During my tenure, I am also grateful that College had very fruitful and collaborative relationships with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

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With such a foundation, I am optimistic that the stage is set for more meaningful and collaborative discussions at the leadership and working level between College and the other stakeholders.

CM:

In your opinion, what will you like the incoming executive director to be able to achieve during his term of office?

TTY:

I have always believed that alignment and unity in vision of the professional bodies, policy makers and our public healthcare agencies are crucial in healthcare transformation. Moving forward, as primary care transformation takes on an even more crucial role in our country, the new ED would need to work closely with College Council and support its strategic initiatives. Besides implementing education courses and academic programmes for GPs and FPs, College is increasingly consulted by various stakeholders on a variety of primary care issues beyond education and training. As College Council respond to these issues and needs, the ED and secretariat will need to provide timely support and implementation behind the scenes.

I am confident that Dr Jonathan Pang, the incoming ED will do a great job. Jonathan was previously a College Council Member and Honorary Secretary and in fact has also served as ED as I had mentioned earlier. He is therefore well-equipped to lead the College Secretariat.

CM:

After your term as executive director, how else will you be contributing to College?

TTY:

Currently, I continue to serve in the College's FM CME Assessors' Board and her Administration and Human Resources Committee.

My ties with the Council leadership remain very strong. I will continue to provide feedback to its leadership on a variety of primary care issues. In my other professional and related roles, I am involved in primary care transformation planning activities. This means I will continue to look to College for its guidance and position on primary care matters.

CM:

College thanks you for all your efforts as ED, Dr Tham!

CM also spoke to Dr Pang as the new incoming ED.

CM:

Hi Dr Pang, you have been the executive director for College before, and are now back for another term of office. How is it like to step back into your old role? Does it feel the same as it did back then, or different?

Dr Jonathan Pang (JP):

It feels good to be back and being in a familiar environment. I also have a sense of deep responsibility to fulfil the expectations of the President and the new Council. Only 3 of the staff are still around when I last left. Quite a few new faces! But the office is still the same!

CM:

What do you hope to achieve during your term of office?

JP:

I hope to get to know the rest of the staff better and build on the good work done by Dr Tham. We are adding a new staff and hope everyone can get along and build up a good team spirit to ensure the work needed can be delivered across smoothly and effectively. I also hope that we can be of use and benefit all our members!

CM:

Who do you have to work closely with, as executive director?

JP:

The people that I need to work closely are Prof Goh as IFM Director and also Jennifer, Asst GM, to ensure all our staff are able to work well to deliver our courses and regular programmes without any hiccups, if possible.

CM:

Do you foresee any challenges ahead?

JP:

The main challenge are to maintain and develop further the team spirit and cohesiveness of the secretariat. The other main challenge is to help IFM develop the enhanced GDFM programme and get more suitable people on board to helm the various programmes and keep it sustainable. We must, of course, remain relevant and useful to our members to help them maintain their professional development as well as get enough CME points to renew their practising certificates.

CM:

Lastly on a personal note and not related to business, what is your hobby? Do surprise us a bit!

JP:

No real hobbies other than watching a little bit of serials, Korean or American on iPad before sleep. Have started doing some cycling on those shared bikes (e.g. Mobike) recently as a form of exercise, with my wife and son, late at night.

CM:

CM wishes you all the best in your new portfolio, Dr Pang!

■ CM