

Channel NewsAsia Panel Interview on Patient Empowerment

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College President Dr Tan Tze Lee represented the College of Family Physicians Singapore at this panel discussion held on 7 May 2018, and this was subsequently broadcasted on national television in the “Perspectives” series by Channel NewsAsia (CNA). The topic of the panel interview was “Patient Empowerment”, and other participants included Geriatrician Dr Wong Sweet Fun, Cardiologist Dr Lim Toon Wei, Mr Raman Singh, CEO of MundiPharma and CNA moderator Ms Karen Lam.

Information is power... or is it?

The rise of internet and the availability of large quantities of medical information to patients is a double-edged sword. For patients can be informed, misinformed or both. On this matter, Dr Tan commented that:

“Sometimes there are misconceptions about what they have actually learnt, and very often we (doctors) have to sift through all these thick documents, well this one works and this one doesn’t work, and what you (the patient) believe is not quite right.. and you steer them along the way. Hence in a sense a good Family Physician in my view is a guide, he gives that map for the patient to look at, and perhaps find a way to give them some hope, so that that target is very attractive.”

Training Family Physicians to be good guides to patients

Yes, our College takes Family Medicine training very seriously.

“One of the things is, when patients come, very often they have questions and when they have questions we try our best to answer those questions, and at the same time we also try and help them to navigate the meandering stream of medical information that they encounter, sometimes it is true, very often it is not. So, we need to clear those misconceptions. So that is what we try and do in College, we train our trainee doctor to do that, to be able to help them to be guides.”

The importance of time

When asked whether patients actually walk into the consultation room dictating their own treatment, Dr Tan replied that:

“Of course, all the time. Because they have already made up their mind. Some of them really do come with bags and bags of blood tests or stuff that they found out about themselves. And when you go through it, actually the story that comes out is really simple. Just

needed some time to go through it. And that amount of time being spent to dispel the misconceptions is well worth it.”

To that, Ms Karen Lam the moderator opined that this would require time resources, a challenge in busy General Practice clinics.

“Well, in my practice we do run on appointments, sometimes we run over, my patients understand, and because we are part of the landscape of where I practice, it is not a problem. I have a friendly coffee shop just across the road and they will go there and have a coffee before they see me. So, you have to make a conscious choice to do that, so as a Family Physician I would recommend to all my mentees and all my colleagues, take your time with the patients, give them time, and it will be rewarded. It’s all about relationship.”

On Fake (Medical) News seen by patients on the Internet

Ms Lam raised an example in China, where a student requested for cancer treatment based on research done from the internet, and died as a result. To that, Dr Tan mentioned that:

“You need to have a trusted health care professional, who can give you an unbiased advice... Goes back to the friendly family doctor that you see from the time you were small... Some one that you trust... And ultimately it is that trust that is important. Because there is so much stuff out there. It’s a jungle to navigate through.”

“Once you have a guide, it could even be your pharmacist, pharmacists are very knowledgeable people! It could be your community nurse.. So I have always felt that within the health care environment, the team is all important to provide that care, it doesn’t matter who.”

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On Telemedicine and Artificial Intelligence

“If you talk about say Telemedicine, for an example as a case, we had an afternoon symposium on this a few weeks back ... The trouble is, you must have a platform where you have to be sure that the person at the other end of the platform is number one, truly a patient and number two truly a doctor. So there are these two fundamental things. So there must be some trust that this platform actually does that. The second thing is how well can you actually manage a patient just by looking down the telephone. Some people say yes, but many of us say no. Because you can't examine, you can't take things at face value that I am this, this or that, or the other. (Example on space station.) Very often, unless you are in that sort of situation (where) you have all the equipment, very often you are not able to fully assess. So for most of us, we would say we would be able to offer Telemedicine to our patient that we have seen at least once before. Those are actually

in some of our guidelines. And then if our patients are known to us, we are able to offer them advice.”

“Artificial intelligence..Where does the buck stop? If AI is going to be able to do it. If something goes well, that is fine. What if it goes awry, what if it goes bad, who is responsible for that AI decision? So these are things we have to contend with as medical professionals, because end of the day, the buck stops with us.”

In Conclusion

“If every Singaporean has their own family doctor. I think they will be very much more empowered than they are now, because they will have someone they can go to, with their problems. And if this primary care doctor, this family physician, this GP, is freely chosen by the patient, you will have much better outcomes. You will have much better cost savings, and the whole delivery of health care will be very much improved.”

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8th ASEAN Dengue Day Seminar – Primary Care at the Forefront

by Dr Cheong Siew Meng, MCFP(S)

The 8th ASEAN Dengue Day Seminar was held on 23 June 2018 at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. An annual seminar organised by the National Centre for Infectious Disease (NCID), the event aimed to keep general practitioners and healthcare workers up to date on the latest developments in dengue management. This is timely as May to October is the traditional peak dengue season in Singapore.

This year's event focused on dengue prevention efforts in the community, with the spotlight on primary care. Bringing together speakers from key stakeholders, who are Ministry of Health (MOH), National Environment Agency (NEA), College of Family Physicians (CFPS), Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH) NUS and NCID, the seminar provided a comprehensive update covering the latest in vaccination, vector control, epidemiological trends and roles of the primary care physician in dengue control.

The seminar kicked off with Prof Leo Yee Sin, Executive Director of NCID, updating the audience on the mission and capabilities of the new NCID building, which will be operationalised from November 2018. With a 330 bed capacity and capabilities for advanced infectious disease treatment, control and research, the NCID will strengthen Singapore's ability to respond, contain and manage infectious disease outbreaks.

Mr Yusuke Kita from MOH then shared the ministry's framework for dengue vaccine implementation, and shared key considerations for its use in Singapore. Using an evidenced-based approach, primary care and infectious disease physicians could adopt a risk stratification and shared decision model to ensure persons most at risk of severe dengue can be protected.

Vector control and bite avoidance continue to be the cornerstone of dengue eradication efforts, and the next 2 speakers sought to update the audience on the latest in these domains. Dr Christina Liew and Dr Wilson Tan, who are entomological experts from NEA, provided interesting insights in *Aedes aegypti* behaviour and how native disease-causing population interacts and responded to an introduced *Wolbachia*-carrying *Aedes* males. I can quote Sun Tzu from his book “Art of War”

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”