

HealthServe – a GP-Led Holistic Care VWO

An Interview with Dr Goh Wei Leong, Co-founder of HealthServe

Interviewed by Dr Chan Hian Hui, Vincent, FCFP(S), Council Member, Team C Editor

College has been very impressed with Dr Goh Wei Leong's work with HealthServe and how it has gained national recognition, raising the profile of Family Medicine. Dr Goh kindly agreed to an interview with me on 09 May 2018. During the interview Dr Goh shared with me that his volunteering journey began when his good friend and dentist, Dr Simon Mahendran, asked him to volunteer at the Karunya Community Clinic which serves marginalised migrant workers.



Dr Vincent Chan (left) and Dr Goh Wei Leong

And this he did, providing his first glimpse into this work. Also, "looking around... (he) observed the increasing numbers of migrant workers in Singapore," and by volunteering he gradually came to understand the complexity of issues facing these marginalised migrant workers.

Thus, about 12 years ago, Dr Goh decided to hold a party in his house and gathered some 15 to 20 friends, including a few doctors, and told them of about "this crazy idea about setting up this thing (HealthServe)." And to his surprise, his friends told him that it was a great idea. And 3 of the General Practitioners (GPs) among them helped him register and set up HealthServe as a medical clinic. These 3 GPs include Dr Soh Ling Ling, Dr Teo Boon See and Dr Lau Kit Wan. Dr Goh also invited A/Prof Wong Mee Lian, A/Prof Lim Poh Lian, Dr Shawn Vasoo and Dr Jeremy Lai to help out as well. Dr Goh mused that he is a "networker...a collaboration kind",



Migrant workers making a beeline for HealthServe - both outside and inside the clinic.



one who gathers a team to work on this project. He is also very grateful for the enormous support from his businessman co-founder, Mr Tang Shin Yong and the 2 of them are the main drivers for HealthServe.

On the unexpected growth of HealthServe as an organisation, Dr Goh said that "to be honest, (he) had no plans to grow it into what it is today. Doctors, we just bring our stethoscope, we donate some of our drugs, speak to some pharmaceuticals,

can make it lah." one of their first tasks was to secure a physical clinic space, and it was decided that this must be "where the migrants are, where the needs are, and we found Geylang." And the clinic was located inside a place called High Point Community Services, where the rent was low as it was zoned as a social enterprise. So they started very small with just a clinic. But as they received their "first few migrant workers that came in, (they) realised that my goodness, they got problems that doctors cannot solve." Dr Goh shared that if the patient has cough or back pain, this can be alleviated with medications.

Creating a Holistic Care Framework

"But (he) personally realised that migrant workers got lots of problems including no shelter, no makan (food), no job. So, when that happens, what do I do? Do I carry on giving medicines and say good luck to you, or one has

to intervene?" And intervene HealthServe did, and that required some fund raising which was done. HealthServe thus launched a food programme, topped up MRT cards, and phone cards so that these injured workers and others in need of assistance can call home. For the injured with no place to stay, pocket money was also given out. In the early days, they did not have the luxury of referring to a Medical Social Worker (MSW), so HealthServe had to create the service with Dr Goh inviting Social Work and Counsellor friends to provide this service. He notes that many of these migrant workers also suffer from depression and a few are suicidal. And gradually, the work team expanded to include doctors, nurses, dentists, medical social workers and counsellors. Such is the confidence that Tan Tock Seng Hospital has in their services, that they refer migrant workers to HealthServe for further care and befriending support, under a signed agreement. To better assist these marginalised migrant workers, HealthServe also does "upstream work" such as research and advocacy, and they have started engaging with the Ministry of Manpower on key issues facing their patients.

When asked about his thoughts on getting the Straits Times Singaporean of the Year Award for 2017, he said that it was a "seriously humbling award... and it was given to the entire organisation and not just (himself)." For they even have migrant workers volunteer at their centre. For younger doctors, Dr Goh advises that "one has to do what (one is) passionate about. And sometimes we find that passion when we are attentive to what's going on around us... And working your passion through these issues, (bring) us sort of joy." He also salutes the generosity of many doctor colleagues, including neurosurgeons who performed a spinal surgery on a patient for free and senior ophthalmology consultants who waive their consultation fee for these needy patients. Dr Goh ends off with the remark that "I am happy to say that a platform like HealthServe brings up the best in our fraternity, and I want to thank everyone for that."



All images courtesy of Dr Natarajan Rajaraman, HealthServe medical director



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