

Ramping Up to 2019

by Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 26th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

As we come to the end of 2018, many of us tend to wax lyrical about the holiday season and look forward to taking that year end break and enjoying the seasonal festivities.

Christmas trees, glittering with angels and silver bobbles, frantic shopping trips to get those all-important presents, Mickey popping up on Orchard Road, turkey roasts, all the trappings and feasting of the holiday season herald the approach of Yuletide and the New Year. It brings closer to home the reality that another year has gone by at lightning speed, and we are once again coming to the start of a new year.

As we look back at what 2018 has meant for College, for us in the council serving you our members, and the wider FP fraternity, we are amazed at just what a year it has been. In May we commemorated World Family Doctor Day. It was very well attended, and I must say the camaraderie was electric. We took this opportunity to honour our tutors and supervisors who selflessly dedicate their time and energy to mentor our trainees.

We had our convocation in November. It was a fabulous time as we welcomed our new Collegiate members and Fellows, and celebrated with our successful candidates. We had done very well indeed in 2018, with excellent pass rates for all the programmes, surpassing previous years. That same sense of belonging to the family of our College was palpable, and this is something I hope will continue to grow from strength to strength over the years.

We sent a contingent from College to attend the GPTEC 2018 (General Practice Training and Education Conference) principally to learn more about how GP training is conducted in Australia. There are 9 registered GP training organisations; we were particularly impressed by our hosts GPEx of South Australia, who are advocates and practitioners of programmatic assessment in GP training. The programme allows for very close supervision and more personalized mentoring, and results in very well trained GPs who are at the top of their cohort. We have much to learn from them, and they are willing and enthusiastic teachers.

We also attended the World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA) World Conference in Seoul in October, and presented a bid to hold the regional Asia Pacific Region WONCA conference in Singapore in 2021. Although we were unsuccessful, the bid being awarded to Myanmar, we had many opportunities to network and connect with colleagues and FM leadership from across the world. We were able to share experiences, learn from each other and build up networks for future collaboration.

As we are all aware, the Fee Benchmark Committee was set up in January 2018, and College was represented by our Assistant Honorary Secretary, Dr Lim Hui Ling. The

first of the recommendations were released in November which covered over 200 common surgical conditions. Soon, it will be our turn in primary care. In preparation for this, College plans to conduct a survey of our members in private practice, to find out the true costs of providing the care for your patients. If most of us are able to complete the survey accurately, this will give the data in our survey more credence and reliability. It will give a more accurate picture of the costs involved to provide best care, and allow us to present these findings to the benchmark committee when they discuss primary care fees in the future.

Thanks to the Ministry's sustained efforts nationally to promote Family Medicine, we are now seeing more and more of our young doctors choosing FM as a discipline and specialty to pursue, be it the GDFM, the FM residency programmes, the MMed(FM) College programme or the College Fellowship programme. With each successive cohort of FPs graduands, the standards continue to improve. Anecdotally, many of us have been told by our hospital specialist colleagues that our MMed(FM) is so much more demanding, as the depth and width of knowledge is immense. Whereas other subspecialties deal with their own field, our FP candidates are expected to have in-depth knowledge across the whole spectrum. Be it paediatrics, adult medicine, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, geriatrics, mental health, they are expected to be able to manage them at quite a high level. Of course our candidates prepare for them very well indeed! All this preparation is very useful, as it gives them the added skills necessary to work in the various settings that FM serves in our healthcare system.

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As Family Medicine continues to add value to our healthcare landscape, we hope that the efforts of our FM community to better train our FPs will be recognised, and that our discipline will one day be recognised in Singapore for what it really is: a specialty. Many of our ASEAN neighbours already recognise FM as a specialty; Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia!

We are all participants of this remarkable journey. It is a journey that aims to improve standards of our specialty, such that it is well respected by other specialties. It is a journey to equip every family physician with the necessary skills to manage complex cases in the community. It is a journey to earn professional recognition that family medicine is a medical specialty in its own right.

Minister Gan himself said and I quote: **“we are giving more recognition to these doctors. In 2014, the Chapter of Family Medicine Physicians was formed under the Academy of Medicine Singapore. This recognises Family Physicians with Fellowship as being on par with that of specialists.”**

My Christmas wish....

That MOH would also follow suit.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

■ CM

Braving New Frontiers in Family Medicine for Research and Regional Health Systems

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

It is the dawn of a new age for family medicine! For many, it may seem like unfamiliar grounds and thus cause for concern. But for some, it means exploring new frontiers and pushing the boundaries for family medicine. Family physicians, being generalists, are well poised to go beyond the traditional role in primary care, to take on the challenge of the silver tsunami and fragmented care in intermediate and long term care (ILTC) sectors and regional health system (RHS) work. In this article, we had the privilege of interviewing Dr Low Lian Leng who is one such person braving this new frontier and doing his part to further our cause. I'm also proud of him because he is my younger brother who had done well and exceeded many people's expectations!

College Mirror (CM):

Hi Lian Leng, thank you so much for accepting our interview. And please accept our heartiest congratulations on your recent appointment as Director, SingHealth Office of Regional Health, SGH Campus, and for receiving the NUS Medicine Young Alumnus of the Year 2018! Can you tell us more about the award that you have been presented with, as well as your new job scope?

Dr Low Lian Leng (LLL):

Hi Luke, I was awarded the NUS Medicine Young Alumnus of the Year 2018 that recognizes a young alumnus who had distinguished themselves in their chosen field or path-less-taken. This is recognition for the Regional Health System work and population health research I have been

doing, in addition to mentoring medical students and younger family physicians for their research and career.

I was appointed as the Director, SingHealth Office of Regional Health, SGH Campus since 1st Jan 2018. In this new role, I work closely with the SGH Campus institutions leadership, and the SingHealth Regional Health System (RHS) HQ, to implement and monitor RHS programs in SGH Campus. I act as the primary liaison for RHS matters between institution leadership and RHS HQ, and harness the strengths of SGH Campus institutions to play our increasingly important regional health role to improve population health. Being a member of the RHS leadership team, I also work closely with domain experts to strategize and plan programs to meet the needs of the community.

In addition to population health, I am also charged with innovation and improvement efforts to ensure the timely and seamless transition of patients between our institutions, intermediate and long term care and community care.

CM:

How have you found the work so far?

LLL:

We are in a phase of rapid growth and expansion, therefore the pace has been breath taking. Many excellent programs have been implemented in partnership with our community partners and grassroots. Community Nursing is one fine example, which has grown from strength to strength in SGH Campus. We started with 25 hospital-based nurses who were totally

