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STRENGTHEN
Primary Care
ENHANCE
Family Medicine

The College of Family Physicians Singapore is honoured to have the Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health, A/Prof Benjamin Ong graced the World Family Doctor Day Dinner on 25th May 2019, at the ParkRoyal on Pickering.

A/Prof Ong delivered the following speech.

Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee, President of College of Family Physicians Singapore

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. I am happy to join you tonight to commemorate the World Family Doctors' Day. This day was first declared in 2010 by the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) to highlight the significance of the role and contributions of family doctors in healthcare systems around the world.

This event is an opportune platform for us to acknowledge the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) for promoting the profile and raising the standards of family medicine as a discipline. Since the College's inception in 1971, it has made key contributions to postgraduate family medicine training, encouraging and assisting young doctors in preparing for and establishing themselves in the practice of family medicine.

The theme of World Family Doctors' Day this year is "Family doctors – caring for you for the whole of your life". This encapsulates our own vision for primary care to be the first point of contact for our patients, and for every Singaporean to have a regular family doctor throughout their life journey, "from cradle to grave".

Need To Strengthen Primary Care

We are all familiar with the growing healthcare needs that our ageing population brings. We see an increasing proportion of patients who are elderly and with multiple chronic conditions as well as social needs. The rising trend of smaller family sizes also means less family support for our seniors, with an increasing number of them living on their own or with an equally elderly spouse.

Our healthcare system was initially designed for a younger population with lower chronic disease burden and complexity. Most care was episodic. We have since embarked on a shift from episodic hospital-based

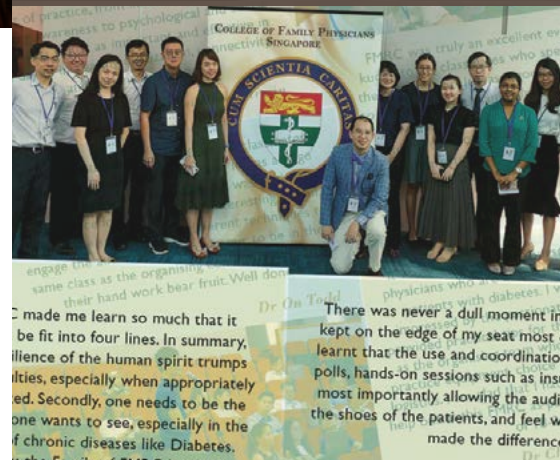
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care to holistic community-based care and made efforts to defragment care. However, many patients continue to be managed by multiple specialists, and hence have multiple treatment plans. Most can better benefit from having a proficient generalist with broad-based clinical knowledge and skills overseeing and providing comprehensive, continuing and coordinated care.

Hence, we have to continue strengthening primary care as the foundation of our healthcare system. To realise our vision of "One Singapore, One Family Doctor", we need more such "proficient generalists" practising in the community, and resourced to provide effective and affordable care. We have rolled out various policies and initiatives over the years to better support our family doctors. In January 2018, we set up the Primary Care Networks (PCN) scheme to encourage GPs to organise themselves into networks to share clinical and administrative resources for holistic chronic disease management. We last expanded the Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP) in June 2018 to cover pre-diabetes and ischaemic heart disease to enable more patients to use their MediSave to pay for outpatient treatments. From November this year, there will be several enhancements to the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS), including the addition of a CHAS Green tier. With this, all Singaporeans, regardless of household income, can receive subsidies at CHAS GPs for the management of CDMP conditions, in line with the vision to enhance anchoring of chronic care in primary care.

Need To Enhance Family Medicine

Even as we support our family doctors through various resourcing and financing enhancements, we need to work with them to continue to enhance their clinical skills in Family Medicine to meet the growing and varied needs in the community. As the Workgroup for Family Medicine Residency Review noted among its recommendations to the Ministry last year, Family Physicians are skilled generalists, who practise primarily in the community, whose expertise lies in providing holistic care to meet the individual's biopsychosocial needs through a long-term patient-physician relationship. They are the first point of contact for patients, providing comprehensive care throughout

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the continuum of a person's life cycle. Structured Family Medicine training is key to equip doctors with broad-based knowledge and skills at the postgraduate level to take on these challenging roles in various primary and community care settings.

In recent years, we have seen an encouraging increase in the number of doctors who take up Family Medicine training and achieve accreditation as Family Physicians. With our ageing population and evolving healthcare landscape, we will need even more doctors to acquire higher-level knowledge and skills to manage increasingly complex patients within the primary and community care settings. The Ministry is working with the College as well as our healthcare clusters to further expand our national Family Medicine training capacity across various programmes, including the Family Medicine residency and Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) programmes.

Even as we increase the number of Family Physicians, we will need to look at how they can be trained and recognised at a higher level of professional competencies, to manage a growing number of patients with increasing disease complexities in the community, including those whose care is shifted from the hospitals. Family Physicians will also increasingly lead team-based care, participate in inter-professional collaboration, and coordinate cross-setting care for their patients. There will also be growing involvement of Family Physicians in key areas such as child health, geriatrics and mental health.

The way care is delivered will also continue to evolve and mature. For the individual Family Physician, this may mean choices in scopes and settings of practice in future, than that dictated by tradition. For example, more Family Physicians may be involved in cross-setting practice, such as across primary care and home care or community hospitals. Beyond shifts in the settings of practice, Family Physicians will also play greater roles in emerging models of care, such as providing tele-care and facilitating self-care by the patient and their support circle.

In anticipation of these changes, we will continue to study how we can further broaden and deepen the competencies of doctors in primary and community care, encourage them to do so through Family Medicine training, and recognise those with such higher levels of competency.

In closing, I commend the College for their outstanding leadership in shaping and developing the Family Medicine community in Singapore over the last 47 years. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to all family doctors for your dedication and commitment in providing person-centred care. We look forward to your continued partnership with us in various programmes to raise the standards of Family Medicine, strengthen primary and community care, and deliver better care for our patients.

Thank you.

■ CM

Arts and Humanity of Family Medicine

*Speech delivered by Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee,
President, 26th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore
at the World Family Doctor Day Dinner on 25th May 2019*

Associate Professor Benjamin Ong, Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health
Past presidents
Council
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you very much for joining us as we celebrate World Family Doctor Day. Every year we take this opportunity to commemorate the many achievements and contributions our family doctors have made to our communities in Singapore.

Our history with WONCA goes back a long way. From the early days in the 1970s, through to 2001 when the College hosted the WONCA World Secretariat in some of its rooms at COMB (College of Medicine Building) Singapore, to 2007 when Singapore hosted the WORLD WONCA Conference, our relationship with WONCA has always been very strong and we continue to have an active role in the Asia Pacific Region. Through the many contributions of our past presidents like A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean and Dr Alfred Loh, our College has left an indelible and very positive mark on WONCA.

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