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Editor's Words

by Dr Irwin Clement A. Chung Wei Hoong, MCFP(S), Editor (Team B)

The time has come for me to pen my final installment for this magazine. It's been an amazing 6 years working with the College Secretariat and the Editorial Team to bring you a quarterly reflection of what is current and happening in the family medicine fraternity. Much has evolved in the local family medicine scene since I started off with the team back in the days I was working as medical director of Ang Mo Kio – Thye Hua Kwan Hospital. Since then, we have celebrated a good many World Family Doctor Days, we have formed our own Chapter in the Academy of Medicine, and produced scores of new graduates from our FM residency programmes. Singapore's healthcare system has undergone yet another massive overhaul, with the amalgamation of regional health systems into full service clusters and formation of the new National University Polyclinics group. Family Medicine Centres (FMC) – a first in primary care public-private partnership – have been developed and launched, Primary Care Networks (PCN) have been formed and expanded, CHAS has been introduced and, even at this point, preparing for yet another expansion. And everyone is chanting the mantra of Family Medicine and Primary Care being the bedrock of our future healthcare. With all this enthusiasm and energy going round, I am certainly not alone in finding it quite enticing to jump on the bandwagon of change and eagerly ride the tide of reform.

Speaking of reform, I do happen to notice also that it is not a term that is liberally used in this country. But you always see the word being used in the news when describing, say, the economic transformation of communist countries, or perhaps a political awakening in some jurisdictions, or even, closer to heart, the funding and governance changes to the British NHS. Perhaps reform hits a sour note as it implies something was not done right and so had to be corrected, and therefore some of us are loathe to use the word too liberally. But reformation is not a bad thing, really. It's not something one does just because a predecessor has done a crap job (pardon the straight talk). Very often it's simply a necessary thing to do in order to move

with the times, or to meet new challenges. Sometimes science gets ahead of us, other times it's a cultural shift that has finally come to a head with how we have always perceived and done things. The practice of medicine as a whole has evolved; we do not need to belabour the point about moving away from a paternalistic, unidirectional doctor-patient compact to a more engaging and empowering patient care model. Likewise, the move from singular 'bao ka liao' singleton GP practice to a more diverse and comprehensive team-based practice as enunciated in the FMC and PCN models, and similarly the successful "teamlet care model" pioneered by the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics.

Change is the only constant, so they say, and change we must to stay relevant. With our rapidly ageing population (and not enough babies), stagnating workforce size (because we cannot cope with too many "Others"), entrance of millennials into active economy (along with their very different world view), maturing of our institutions and overt attempts to keep citizens rooted with a sense of belonging to this land (I find it weird and absolutely contrived to concertedly talk about 700 years of history when we are supposed to be celebrating a Bicentennial), the challenges we face in the next 50 years are enormous. The whole country is in a struggle to stay relevant and remain a jewel (pun intended) at the crossroads of trade and commerce, and continue to spark joy and zest in its population.

So perhaps, during these exciting times, we need to pause and reflect – to what end is this reform journey heading? The articles offered in this edition of the College Mirror have been curated with that in mind, with a good mix of experiential, philosophical and sometimes introspective reading that hopefully will send many of our minds on a personal "quo vadis" as to the hopes and aspirations, roles and responsibilities of Family Medicine now and in the future.

I wish you the very best, and happy reading. Thank you.

■ CM