

2019 WFDD Theme: “Family doctors – caring for you for the whole of your life”

Adapted from World Family Doctor Day 2019 report by Prof Michael Kidd
by Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Hon. Treasurer, Chief Editor, Team D Editor

World Family Doctor Day (WFDD) – 19th May - was first declared by WONCA in 2010 and it has become a day to highlight the role and contribution of family doctors in health care systems around the world. The event is a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge the central role of our specialty in the delivery of personal, comprehensive and continuing health care for all our patients. It's also a chance to celebrate the progress being made in family medicine and the special contributions of family doctors globally.

This year we decided to highlight the role of family doctors in providing life- long care to their patients – “from cradle to grave”. We especially wanted to emphasise that family doctors have a key role in the management of children and their pivotal role in palliative and end of life care.

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. As is now the custom, the day was celebrated widely in many countries across the globe. Of particular note this year was the launch of two books which are featured in this report - both show what our specialty of family medicine is about - but from totally different perspectives. One of them is from Singapore. This interesting book was launched in Singapore in celebration of World Family Doctor Day 2019.

“Being Human” is a collection of pictures, accompanying stories, and reflections. The pictures were drawn by medical students of the National University of Singapore during their Year 3 Family Medicine posting (of eight weeks) in workshops titled Pictures from the Frontline and taught by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean from 2012 to 2017 (this generated 200 pictures – one from each clinical group taught). Of

The Work of a Fraternity Interview with A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean

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

The College Mirror team is delighted to feature this interview with Associate Professor Cheong Pak Yean on his new book "Being Human - stories from Family Medicine."

This book's focus on the human aspects of Family Medicine is a timely reminder to us on why we became doctors in the first place. And that is to serve the people, in health and sickness, and across all demographics and social backgrounds. We are the grassroots of Medicine, and we are everywhere.

Prof Cheong and his co-editor Dr Ong Chooi Peng have made every effort to bring Family Physicians from every setting together and contribute to this book. By their effort, this work can truly be considered the “work of our fraternity”.

We shall now share this interview with our readers.

College Mirror (CM):

How did inspiration for this book come about?

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean (CPY):

One and a half years ago, the workshop “Pictures from the Frontline” I conducted for Year 3 medical students at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (YLL NUS) was discontinued. I had, through those 5 years, collected the students' works as drawings on A4 paper. Going through more than 200 drawings, I realised that I had a goldmine of rich observations. I showed selections of these drawings to colleagues, for example the series on dying (topics 4.12 to 4.15) to Dr Tan Yew Seng, a family physician doing palliative work. Yew Seng wrote profound insights that validated my resolve to share these treasures for posterity.

CM:

This is a project, many years in the making, when did you first work on it?

these, 72 were shown to seasoned family physicians to comment, add their experiential stories, as well as their reflections.

The lively book, designed in full colour by Liw Yi Ling, cohesively integrated both words and pictures to tell vibrant stories of life. Even the cover has a story – A riot of colours of the Zinnias growing out of a flower bed, and reflecting life – colourful, messy, but vibrant.

The 168-page book has 72 topics organised into five chapters (with the number of topics in parentheses): Doctor and Patient (9); Challenges to Care (16); Family and Sexuality (15); Being Human (15); and In Practice (14).

Being Human depicts the Hippocratic wisdom of Art outlives life. All medical students and all practitioners are potential beneficiaries. Enjoy.

■ CM

If you'd like to purchase *Being Human: Stories from Family Medicine* (\$16), please contact Cynthia (+65 9668 1004)



"Being Human", Cheong Pak Yean and Ong Chooi Peng (editors).

CPY:

In a sense, I started on the book 7 years ago with that workshop on the human dimensions of medicine. The book project is novel; the blurb on the back-cover states that it combines "the observations of medical practice by young medical students with the reflections of seasoned practitioners". Dr Ong Chooi Peng, my co-editor and I are determined that the works of both students and family physicians should speak for themselves. We did not use captions for the drawings of students and neither did we display the post-graduate qualifications and institution affiliations of the doctors. The initial attempts at getting contributions were difficult but as works like that from Yew Seng came in, contributors could see the value of this book.

CM:

How did you form your project team?

CPY:

When Chooi Peng agreed to be the co-editor, I was elated. She had collaborated in two other books with me and Prof Goh Lee Gan on the extended consultation. I knew her editing proclivity and her 'magic pen' that often transformed inchoate words written to something that better expressed actual experience. Finally, Liw Yi Ling, a talented graphic designer whipped the chunks of texts and drawings into the coherent book design for the 168-page full-colour book.

CM:

How did you convince the medical students to do the drawings?

CPY:

I know that medical students as a group are clever and many are talented and creative. Unfortunately, I too believe that some of their empathy for people gets eroded by the medical school's focus on the physical body and the very structured language that we teach. Accessing their intuitive faculties (and by-passing their cognitive filters) is my key to unlocking their experience. I put my skills honed as a psychotherapist to effect. I showed them pictures by other students that vicariously drew on the feelings of the 'there and then' and demonstrated how we could share it with others by speaking in the 'here and now'. I then encouraged each to recall salient experience to share verbally (using body, spoken and para-language) within their clinical group (CG), then choose one story to collaboratively express in the form of a drawing. Each CG would then tell the story to the class based on that drawing.

CM:

How did you mobilise the Family Medicine fraternity for this project?

(continued on Page 11)

(continued from Page 9: 2019 WFDD Theme - "Family doctors - caring for you for the whole of your life")



A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean (seated; second from left) at the World Family Doctor Day dinner on 25th May 2019 with some guests. The book "Being Human: Stories from Family Medicine" was formally launched by the College at the dinner

CPY:

I have the advantage of having interacted with many family physicians in my 4 decades of medical practice. I connected with more than 70 doctors, showed them selections of drawings that may be meaningful to them. I spent hours with some contributors talking about their experience. For example, I ate many burgers for lunch at the McDonald's restaurant below Clementi Polyclinic while fleshing out Ang Lai Lai's stories of pregnant teenagers (3.13- 3.15).

For the last chapter "In practice", I engaged colleagues both in family medicine and outside who have contextual leadership experience and years in practice. We polled younger colleagues too. Family Medicine residents and young registrars also contributed interesting stories.

CM:

What were the key challenges faced while doing this work?

CPY:

The first was cynicism and even disdain. One has to have very "thick skin" to accept covert rejections to contribute. I had to cash in on my depository of goodwill as many of the contributors were my former students. Doctors are very busy people, and some have writer's block. Chooi Peng role's was pivotal. She has a knack of processing all manner of formative drafts thrown at her. Producing the book was another challenge. We were heartened when College President Tan Tze Lee and his council embraced it. Prof Doris Young, head of the Family Medicine Dept in YLL NUS, also wrote an encouraging foreword.

CM:

What do you hope to achieve from this book?

CPY:

The first is to tell the medical profession and public that medicine goes beyond the body as evident from the stories told. This is especially for family medicine which is trans-disciplinary through the patients' journey in life. The book is written also for patients. They would be able to empathise with the stories their doctors tell. We are now working on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses to teach the human dimensions of medicine using the book as resource.

CM:

Are we expecting a "Part 2" from this book?

CPY:

We are just recovering from the trials of making the book. With the use of the book for undergraduate and postgraduate courses, a reprint would be necessary. It was also well received at the World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA) Asia-Pacific Conference in Kyoto May 2019. Various sister organisations in the Asia-Pacific also asked the College for copies. The 2023 WONCA meeting will be hosted by Singapore and its theme is naturally "The Art of Family Medicine". Part 2 is therefore not just about the book; it is about sparking interest in and education about the human dimensions of medicine.

■ CM