

# Sharing on the 9th ASEAN Dengue Day Seminar

by Dr Wong Wei Mon, FCFP(S)

## Representing CFPS, a great honour

I was given the honour to represent the College to speak in the 9th ASEAN Dengue Day Seminar 2019, organized by the National Centre for Infectious Disease (NCID), on 22 June 2019. The seminar cum media sharing session took place at the newly retrofitted building on the home ground of NCID. NCID's mission and vision is to keep Singapore safe by protecting her people from infectious diseases. The centre's facilities and capabilities were put to the test as Singapore encountered her first imported case of monkey pox. Now, a fortnight later, NCID battles a dengue epidemic.

The College, the Environmental Health Institute - National Environment Agency (EHI-NEA) and the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health have been working together to organise this annual event for several years

now. The professionally organized seminar was attended by some 400 participants; a quarter was primary care physicians, the remainder comprised of 200 nurses, 30 pharmacists and other allied health workers.

## Singapore, a Dengue hot spot

The tiny red dot is an endemic hot spot for dengue. With an effective vector control program, Singaporeans had enjoyed several years of low prevalence and Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) of dengue as compared to our neighbouring countries. Nonetheless, there is no resting on laurels as our ancient foe, the Aedes mosquitos, has adapted itself to survive in our environment of concrete jungle. Over 5200 dengue cases were reported from January to May 2019; a 60% surge as compared to the whole of 2018. EHI's surveillance network of gravitraps reported an increase in mosquito population, contributed partly by global warming. Ironically, we are victims of our own success. A successful vector control program resulted in low herd immunity. An aging population shifted the disease burden to the elderly as sero-prevalence increases with age. To complicate matters, the elderly with dengue present with atypical symptoms and are at risk of severe dengue and complications. This risk is further increased with secondary dengue, comorbidities such as diabetes, and polypharmacy.

## The Role of Family Physicians

Family Physicians, being first touch points for patients, need to maintain a high level of suspicion to enable timely and accurate diagnosis. Dengue is a dynamic disease requiring supportive care. There is a need for close surveillance, with care escalation in the presence of warning signs or where bio-psycho-social factors necessitate. Family Medicine Physicians also play a vital role in continuity of care in terms of longitudinal monitoring both in the out-patient and post discharge period. The value of a "one patient, one family doctor" system is clearly evident and cannot be

overemphasised. Conversely, "doctor-shopping" behaviours can prove detrimental, especially to the frail elderly.

To keep grandma and grandpa with dengue out of the hospital (ambulatory care), prevention

is better than cure. Family Medicine Physicians play a significant role in patient education; in advocating vector control and in giving practical advice to prevent being bitten by mosquitos.

## Other initiatives in vector control

Research in vector elimination such as the Wolbachia project is an on-going effort. The move toward therapeutic platelet transfusion in dengue is evidence-based; the fruit of research. Research in other areas, such as dengue and diabetes, are crucial in shaping future practices. Seminars like this serve as excellent platforms for mind sharing, networking and collaboration.

## Threat of the Aedes Mosquito

Besides dengue, the Aedes mosquito is also vector to other acute viral haemorrhagic illness, including yellow fever. The wanderlust bug makes the world smaller. Singapore and our healthcare system face threats from emerging infectious diseases, in addition to threats posed by the silver tsunami and chronic diseases such as diabetes. Besides war against diabetes, there are many wars to fight. Family Medicine Physicians have to remain vigilant and relevant by up-skilling.

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Dr Wong Wei Mon (4<sup>th</sup> from left), with the other experts at the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Dengue Day.

Images courtesy of Dr Wong Wei Mon

(continued from Page 19: Sharing on the 9th ASEAN Dengue Day Seminar)

### A Central Role for Family Medicine

Family Medicine is a specialty of breadth. Family Medicine Physicians, being experts in trans-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary domains, have unique contributions to share with their specialist colleagues. We already have Family Medicine Physicians who are trained in providing high-quality specialised care in ambulatory chronic disease management, and geriatrics and rehabilitation in community hospitals. There may be a need for us to be trained in the speciality of emerging infectious diseases. Primary care research is another area where efforts can be ramped up. We can value-add by contributing to evidence-based, cost effective and quality care. Besides acquiring core competencies in clinical care, Family Medicine Physicians would benefit from acquiring skills in pedagogy and media communication. Some of us are already in the process of being trained as expert witness.

Family Medicine Physicians wear several hats and play diverse roles. There is no lack of opportunities for aspiring Family Medicine Physicians with a keen interest in bringing care from hospital to the community. A career in Family Medicine can be very fulfilling and rewarding. Art is long, life is short.

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## FAMILY PRACTICE SKILLS COURSE

### Mental Health Update

The College of Family Physicians Singapore would like to thank the Expert Panel for their contribution to the Family Practice Skills Course #81 on “Mental Health Update”, held on 29 & 30 June 2019.

#### Expert Panel:

Dr Kwek Thiam Soo  
Dr Cyrus Ho  
Dr Ong Kian Chung  
Dr Alvin Lum  
A/Prof John Wong  
Dr Wong Tien Hua

#### Chairperson:

Dr Aysha Reema Muhusin

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