

Journey of Fellowship and beyond

Interviewed by Dr Low Sher Guan Luke, FCFP(S), Chief Editor, Team D Editor

A candid conversation with 3 successful graduands of the Fellowship programme – Dr Charmaine Kwan, Dr Christopher Chong and Dr Jeffrey Jiang

College Mirror (CM):

Could you tell us about yourself and share with us your fellowship journey leading up to the exams?

Dr Charmaine Kwan (CK):

I started my Family Medicine journey as a resident under the Singhealth Family Medicine Residency Programme. I graduated from the programme and completed my Masters of Medicine (Family Medicine) in 2016.

Following that, I applied for the fellowship programme in 2017, and was also fortunate to have had the opportunity to join the 5th cohort of the Singapore Chief Residency Programme in the same year.

I am currently working as a family physician in Singhealth Polyclinics – Tampines, and am also a Clinical Core Faculty Member in the Singhealth Family Medicine Residency Programme.

Dr Christopher Chong (CC):

I am a father to 2 curious young kids and my wife is a psychiatrist/psychotherapist who ever so often psychoanalyses me to help me improve. I am currently a family physician and head of Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic. The fellowship has been a great challenge over the 2 years with many other things happening concurrently. During the fellowship course, my clinic was relocated to a new site and there was quite a bit of juggling between work, fellowship and family. However, I had the strong support of colleagues and family. I am indebted to the family medicine department and research unit at NHGP for helping me with the research project and preparing for the exams.

Dr Jeffrey Jiang (JJ):

I am currently a family physician working in a community hospital (St Luke's Hospital). I was privileged to be part of the inaugural batch of the NUHS family medicine residency programme which first started in 2011. I decided to

undertake the fellowship programme in 2017 after I was conferred the Master of Medicine (Family Medicine) by the National University of Singapore.

The fellowship journey was no easy feat, having to juggle the responsibilities of fathering 3 young children, work commitments and fulfilling the requirements of the fellowship programme which was mainly conducted after office hours on weekday evenings and weekends.

The fellowship programme encompassed three key modules, namely clinical practice, scholarly activities and medical pedagogy. This mainly involved attending workshops, group-based discussions and self-directed learning. A senior family physician would supervise the fellowship sessions which trainees took turns to facilitate and conduct. Domain experts were also invited to sessions to provide perspective and shared practical tips to enhance the learning process. The sharing of complex and interesting cases culminated in rich and vibrant discussions resulting in much learning value.

Fellowship trainees were each assigned 2 supervisors who would meet up at least every 6 months. They would review our progress and conduct formative assessments to ensure that learning objectives and key milestones were being achieved and proposed remediation should there be any deficiencies.

Towards the last three months prior to the summative examination, a few of us formed study groups. My group met on a weekly basis to practice journal critiquing, discuss approaches to ethical dilemmas and debate on current medical affairs. We also critiqued each other's clinical case logs and simulated examination conditions.

Seniors from the previous fellowship batches also provided much support by sharing their own experiences, best practices and strategies to perform well in the examinations.

Dr Charmaine Kwan



Dr Christopher Chong with his family

CM:

What was the most memorable incident / experience in the last 2 years?

CK:

Probably getting to meet great colleagues, some of whom have now become great friends! I am grateful for the camaraderie and emotional support, without which the journey would have been a lot tougher.

CC:

I won't forget the many afternoons sitting in cafes with fellowship mates WL and JJ sparring for the exams. These sessions helped to widen my horizons in family medicine. As we practised, we were challenged to think deeper into the many issues surrounding family medicine in Singapore and also take a stand where our views lie in these issues.

Sometimes our discussions got so heated that we disturbed the peace in the cafe!

JJ:

A memorable experience was organising the annual family medicine review course which was held in conjunction of the World Family Doctor Day, with the support of the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and the Chapter of Family Medicine, Academy of Medicine Singapore. This was a great opportunity to interact with fellow trainees who were family physicians from various practice settings as well as staff of CFPS. It was heartening to see how resources could be pulled together so quickly. The tremendous cooperation and hard work manifested in a successful event.

CM:

How has the family medicine fellowship programme benefitted you?

CK:

One of my greatest takeaways from the fellowship programme was in learning how to conduct a research study, as it would not have been something I would have voluntarily tried out otherwise. I can't say that it has been all smooth-sailing, but on hindsight I am glad to have had the opportunity and the invaluable experiences that I have gained.

CC:

I enjoyed acquiring the skills to appraise academic journals and also having first-hand experience at a research project. The fellowship programme also gave me an opportunity to interact with family physicians in other roles which helped me understand the width of what FM does in Singapore. During the exam preparation, I had some time to reflect on the purpose and evolution of family medicine which I felt was a satisfactory culmination of the fellowship programme.

JJ:

The fellowship programme has enhanced my knowledge and skills in clinical practice, education and research and has given me a system-based perspective in the roles Family Physicians can play (e.g. family medicine expert, communicator, collaborator, manager, health advocate, scholar and professional) in effecting value-based and patient-centered healthcare in Singapore.

The skills acquired will enable me to function at the consultant family physician level in St Luke's Hospital as I continue to undertake responsibilities in clinical care such as frailty, teaching, research and organising events. The programme was also a great opportunity to network and forge new friendships.

CM:

Do you have any words of advice for your fellowship juniors?

CK:

I'll pass on advice that I was given at the start of my fellowship journey: to be consistent in working on deliverables that are required in the portfolio – such as starting on the research project early, writing up reflections for learning activities or consistently collecting clinical cases along the way, to avoid panic from setting in during the final few months.

I thought it sounded very clichéd at that time, but it is true that 2 years flies by, and it's easy for all that to end up on the backburner with everything else that may be going on in our lives.

CC:

Towards the last 6 months of fellowship, some of my write-ups were not completed yet and my family had health issues. I felt like giving up and postponing the course. Fortunately with good advice of supervisors and family I pushed on and completed the course. To the fellowship juniors, if you do feel stuck and want to give up, know that many seniors have walked the same path and pushed through. Persevere.

JJ:

This can be summarized with the 3 "Ps":

1. Passion

Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Inc., once said, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do". The fellowship journey is one of self-reflection and perfecting the art of family medicine. Without passion, it would be a painful and arduous process. Ultimately, this should translate to greater patient care and innovative ways to deliver healthcare.

2. Persevere

Despite the challenges faced, I urge you to keep striving and don't give up. Like running a marathon, pace yourself well and

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get friends to run the journey with you. The encouragement I received from family, friends and colleagues kept me going.

3. Play hard

Work-life balance is also important to prevent burn-out. Take time to smell the roses and make an effort to spend time with family and friends. For myself, listening to music and catching up with friends over a good cup of coffee perked me up when I felt physically and mentally drained. Furthermore, the benefits of having enough sleep and exercise cannot be over emphasised.

CM:

Looking ahead, what are your thoughts / plans after the fellowship?

CK:

I've been spending more time with my family, working on house training my puppy, and most recently taking up Malay language classes, which is something I've been wanting to do for a long time.

I think my learning journey still goes on (just without exams!) - there's always so much more to know and for me to improve on as a clinician and an educator.

CC:

I am enjoying my role as a GDFM tutor and will continue to do so. I am also getting more involved in training FM residents and helping them prepare for their MMed(FM) exams. I am looking forward to support some of the research projects happening in my clinic.

JJ:

As I take some time to recharge, I look forward to continue contributing to advancement of Family Medicine in Singapore, specifically in the intermediate and long-term care sector. I will be actively teaching Family Medicine at the undergraduate and postgraduate level and participating actively in activities organised by CFPS. This is all not possible without the help of those who have paved the way before me as I "stand on the shoulders of giants". I am grateful to my SLH and NUHS colleagues who have coached and mentored me. Special thanks also goes to my dear wife who has always been my pillar of support.

■ CM

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