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#SGUnited against CoVID-19

by Adj Asst Prof Low Sher Guan, FCFP(S), Chief Editor

2nd May 2020 is one of the most unforgettable and proudest moment in my life as a fellow Singaporean and a family physician. It was the day when Sengkang Community Hospital was converted into a CoVID Community Care Facility to care for CoVID-infected patients. But that was not the beginning.

Rewind back to when CoVID-19 infection first hit the shores of Singapore in January 2020. Initially we were not exactly sure how severe the infection would be, or how long this would last. All we heard were third party news coming from mainland China. Singapore swiftly implemented a series of travel bans to reduce the import of such cases into Singapore, as well as sparing no efforts in contact tracing and quarantine of infected patients as well as their close contacts to try to stop the big chains of transmission. Nonetheless because of the high infectivity of the virus as well as infected patients being initially asymptomatic and unknowingly shedding the virus, the numbers of infected people continued to rise.

As a fellow Singaporean, I am heartened to see our political and healthcare leaders rising to meet the challenges of CoVID-19 that has far reaching impacts in many facets of our lives. Being very transparent with our people on the situation on the ground helped to boost confidence and reassure the people. We have learned that other countries who implemented immediate lock downs had challenges of scrambling for coping measures as their people and the various services struggled to catch up with such short notice. Instead, Singapore took a very well-considered and balanced approach, while giving fellow Singaporeans time and space to adjust and adapt to these measures. Home-based learning started off as a trial of e-learning for students of all levels, giving opportunities to troubleshoot our school learning space and students and parents to adapt to it, before embarking on full-fledged home-based learning and reducing commute for students. Being able to diversify our sources and having alternate supply chains helped to avert chances of Singapore being stranded with no food sources of good supplies. Urging fellow Singaporeans to only purchase what they need helped to regulate replenishment logistics and ease panic buying and unnecessary stockpiling that may deprive other Singaporeans of essential goods and cause an imbalance in the system. Pledging strong financial support in various budget packages had helped Singaporeans especially those from low-wage bands and needy families to ride over this financial storm and protect livelihoods.

Closing certain terminals in Changi Airport for renovation and expansion helps to reduce operating expenses and ensures that our airport is well positioned to be a successful air hub in the region. Having our prime minister as well as the ministers from related ministries e.g. finance, trade and industrial, education etc, coming forward to address the nation also helped to put many minds at ease and reassure that together as a united Singapore, we are being supported in many ways beyond just healthcare only.

As a family physician working in Singapore, I have to say that our patients in Singapore are indeed in good hands as our healthcare teams tirelessly come together to managed infected patients. Worldwide, Singapore has one of the lowest number of deaths and mortality rates from CoVID-19, and this is testament to the good healthcare system and infection control measures that we have put in place over the years after our SARS experience back in 2002. Our hospitals and primary care clinics stepped up in this crisis and our healthcare staff made many sacrifices during work, facing risk of infection and even discrimination. However, it was also during these moments that we see many acts of kindness towards our staff as well, and it was a constant source of encouragement for many of us who struggled to care for our patients.

With the acute hospitals becoming saturated, we needed innovative ways to house such patients. When we came together to discuss what we could do to help, we came up with an out-of-the-box idea to transfer out existing patients in Bright Vision Hospital to our sister community hospitals in Sengkang and Outram, so that Bright Vision Hospital becomes a designated community hospital to take in CoVID-infected patients. It was a bold move that required a lot of logistics, coordination and communications with patients, their families and our staff. Nonetheless, all of us knew it was a necessary contribution on our part into the national efforts in treating and containing such patients in order to stem out further transmission in the community.

It is during these stress test moments that showed the resilience and solidarity amongst Singaporeans, bringing out our best in each one of us as well as demonstrate the robustness and high quality of our healthcare system. This is when I'm proud to be a fellow Singaporean and a family physician in our little red dot.

■ CM