

My MMed(FM) Journey

Dr Shen Fengli Sharon

I have always enjoyed being a GP and hoped to be able to gain more knowledge to provide the best care possible for my patients. Hence in 2019, I felt that it was the best time for me to embark on the MMed course as my youngest kid no longer needed attention at night, and my oldest child did not have to take any major national school examinations.

Initially, it was a tremendous challenge for me juggling work, family, and the course load. Many times, I felt as though I was going to drop all the balls and fall flat on my face. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I took the opportunity to re-calibrate and go back to basics:

- 1) Eat healthy
- 2) Exercise lots
- 3) Get adequate sleep
- 4) Embrace spirituality.

Nonetheless, I could have not been able to journey in this alone. There is an African saying: "If you want to go fast, go alone; If you want to go far, go together." Before 2020, I used to do annual mountain treks and relied on my

expedition mates to lug me up to the top. This year, I had to count on my study group mates to help ascend Mountain MMed. We had to undergo rigorous training sessions in the months leading up to the exams to ensure that we were all at our optimum "fitness" levels. It was tedious, but we managed to get through most sessions with the aid of bubble tea. Thankfully, all of us conquered the summit successfully together!



Bubble Tea Study Group (from left) Drs Jonathan Foo, Sharon Shen, Jeremy Mong, Wong Nyuk Shiew, Sze Kai Ping

In addition, I am very mindful of the support that we have received from the training faculty, our seniors, our friends in other specialties, and the sacrifices of our

families. Many individuals have given us hundreds of hours (literally) of their precious time to coach us, rally behind us, and I do believe most will continue to be our life-long mentors. It was particularly draining on my husband and extended family, having to pick up my slack on the family front while I was pursuing this goal. My husband said he would only give me this one chance!

For those who are considering this course, I would urge you to dedicate yourself to learning and be assured that you will be enriched at the end of this journey.

Dr Jonathan Tan Wei Jian

“Doing MMed is worthwhile, it makes you a better Doctor.” This was the advice given to me by my mentor, teacher and friend,

Dr Valerie Teo, when I first set out years ago on my Family Medicine journey as a junior Medical Officer at the polyclinic. As I progressed in my career, I discovered my passion for teaching and knew that I had to equip myself with proper training before I could become a better teacher. Thus, after completing my GDFM, I seized the opportunity to apply for the MMed College Programme the first instance I was eligible.

Looking back, I liken the MMed journey to a crucible. This process of refinement has put me in better stead to help my patients and juniors. In a short span of time,

it had forced me to plug my knowledge gaps, improve my diagnostic competency and most importantly, treat a patient holistically.



However, the road to success was not a bed of roses. Being committed to the cause meant sacrificing time with family and friends, health and my interest in cooking. It was also mentally draining as I was often greeted with self-doubt and inadequacy (what with the setbacks from my audit project and being on a constant lookout for the "ideal" case for the logbook). To top things off, there was also the additional stress of dealing with the restrictions COVID-19 had imposed and stepping up to serve at the Swab Isolation Facility.

Despite the struggles, the most pleasant memory would ironically be the weeks preceding the examination where some of us would meet weekly to practise and share our knowledge. This also happens to be, for a rather self-reliant person like me, one of the most humbling revelations, in that no man is an island and that community is important. One can only achieve so much but with the collective wisdom and camaraderie, we can accomplish so much more.

I do owe a debt of gratitude to the community that has supported me through this gruelling journey and constantly reassured me that I could do it. This includes:

- Tutors and supervisors from the College, some of whom have selflessly inconvenienced themselves so that I could reap the benefits of additional preparation.

- Bosses from Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic who have been supportive in granting me the leave I require.
- Tutors from Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic who have sacrificed many lunches, that we may have additional tutorials.
- NHGP tutors in the various preparatory sessions who have imparted their wisdom.
- Above all, my loving wife who has been my pillar of strength, and God, who has sustained me.

Finally, to those considering the MMed Course, it is certainly not for the faint-hearted. I reckon what would help though is speaking to others about what the course entails and arming yourself with the appropriate expectations. The journey is arduous but I would certainly echo the same advice that it was worth it and that I've become a better Doctor!

Dr Tan Lye Yoong

When I was 15 years old, I decided I wanted to be a doctor to help people because it was a noble profession. I was the first doctor in my family and I had no idea of on-calls, the long hours of work and sacrifice or the never-ending training involved. I remember the keen interest I had in every posting as a House Officer, thinking, "Hmm, I think I can train to be an Orthopedic Surgeon/ Gynaecologist/ Paediatrician/ Endocrinologist/ General Surgeon." Obviously, I could not be all that... or maybe I can. In Family Medicine, knowledge of all the specialties are needed minus the major surgery bits.

After GDFM, MMed Fam Med Programme B was a natural next step of post graduate training. While I was comfortable with my daily work and am always trying to learn more on my own to better the care I provide to my patient, MMed training really upskilled me to a whole new level. It helped to cover the massive grounds of all the specialities, from head to toe and from womb to tomb.

During the training, I had a lot of doubts as to why am I doing this, inflicting pain and suffering upon myself, my husband and my daughter as to attend training and studying takes time away from them. As class rep, I had spent time helping others with hopes that as a class, we can all pass together (note to future class reps, it is not your responsibility to help everyone pass). Failing exams last year was difficult.



(from left) Dr Cheryl Christine Chandra, me, my daughter and Dr Ong Ai Li

Residency training takes 3 years, here we are trying to do magic with a 15-month training programme.

I am reminded that God has His reasons and plans. He has brought me through many storms in my life. I have conquered greater challenges with His strength and help. I will not let this "hiccup" define me. I am thankful for my husband, daughter, friends and colleagues who believed

in me and rallied to support me in my retake.

This year, Cheryl and I spent many hours perfecting the art of passing MMed over Zoom study sessions. I also had many friends and colleagues who ran practice cases with me. It does take a village to support people studying for exams. I counted I have done at least 100 consult practices this year to pass the exams.

Although it was tough trying to cramp all that learning on top of a full-time job, while juggling my roles as a wife and mother, it was still worth the journey. I have met many wonderful people and learned from tutors and mentors, some who have become dear friends. A special thank you to all who are involved in the College MMed Programme B teaching whether directly and indirectly. All your effort and sacrifices are raising the standard of care of family physicians in Singapore. I am proud to have become a better family physician because of the programme.

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President's Column

December 2020

by Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 27th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Just last month the NUS Department of Family Medicine (DFM) held its yearly Thanksgiving Dinner celebration. In previous years, we met over dinner, and there was always a lovely programme put together to thank our GP trainers who contribute so much to teach our undergraduate students. This year it was held virtually; dinner was delivered to our homes, and the programme was brought online. We even played the DFM version of "Wheel of Fortune" which was a great success. One of the phrases that came up in the competition was:

"M _ _ _ F _ M _ L _ _ E _ I _ _ _ _ G _ _ T _ G _ I _ _".

"MAKE FAMILY MEDICINE GREAT AGAIN." Indeed we must!

It was a battle cry, resonating with all of us who had been engaged in family medicine training and advocacy over the years. Historically, family doctors were the bedrock on which Singapore medicine was built on. That status had slowly eroded with the advent of sub-specialisation and specialist care. The focus on hospital based care has enabled Singapore healthcare to be at the cutting edge and forefront of medical technology and expertise. All these advancements have come at a cost, a cost that would be difficult to sustain in the longterm.

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Dr Cheryl Christine Chandra

My MMED journey initially began with my decision to take on the GDFM course. This was borne out of my desire to improve my clinical skills to better manage my patients in the polyclinic. Thankfully, I was able to clear the GDFM exams in 2017 but despite the added knowledge acquired during the course of my studies, I still want to learn more, and this spurred me on to move on to the MMED(FM).

To be honest, the MMED experience as a Programme B candidate was quite challenging. I started the journey shortly after I completed my GDFM and I was startled at how much more knowledge, and commitment in time and effort was expected in the MMED program compared to GDFM. It was admittedly tough juggling a full day of work in polyclinic and then come home for a quick dinner followed by my nighttime revision for MMED. However, in that regard, I was fortunate to be supported by an entire 'kampung' of people – my colleagues who graciously covered some of my duties so I could attend teaching courses, my study buddies who moaned and groaned with me but still kept to the discipline of regular study/practice sessions and a very understanding husband who doubled as a driver/cook/cleaner/reluctant mock patient.

Unfortunately, I was not successful in my first attempt in clearing the MMED but thanks to the encouragement of the people around me, I decided to push on and give it

another go. A fellow study buddy of mine was in the same predicament and I remember the both of us meeting up for dinner with our respective husbands shortly after our MMED results were released to promise each other that we would persevere and reattempt the exam together. We came up with a regular study plan, gathered our notes and continued to push each other on.

However, COVID-19 struck and online meetings, tutorials, and lectures became the norm. Physical examination teaching sessions were cancelled. Deep down, I became more doubtful of my chance of passing MMED the second time round. Thankfully, we were fortunate to have dedicated seniors and friends who made time over countless Zoom sessions to practice OSCE scenarios with us and many a night was spent in front of the computer hurriedly flipping through our notes. Together, my friend and I took on the MMED again in 2020 and to my immense relief, we both finally cleared the exam.

The MMED journey is not an easy one but with the support of great friends, colleagues and loved ones, it is a journey that I do not regret embarking on. The knowledge and experience gained in preparing for the exam has given me a greater sense of confidence in dealing with the patients who walk through my door in the clinic and that sense of assurance is the greatest reward from the MMED journey.

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