



Interview with Dr Leong Goh Han Gregory

Interviewed by Dr Chew Sung Boon, Editorial Board Member

Like many of our colleagues, Dr Leong Goh Han Gregory is a General Practitioner (GP) who works long hours at his clinic attending to his patients. He shares with us his thoughts on why he makes an effort to volunteer his time and skills outside of his busy practice.

CM: Gregory, tell us a bit of yourself and your practice.

I am a GP with Shenton Family Medical Clinics. It's a humble HDB practice in Serangoon Ave 2. I serve the surrounding community, mostly heartlanders. I practice purely family medicine.

CM: Your clinic can be really busy, and you still work weekends. When did you start doing volunteer medical work and more importantly, why?

I have been volunteering at Villa Francis Nursing Home for the past 13 years. It's not difficult as we have a group of doctors on roster. I usually serve 1 morning a month for about 2 hours. The home is very flexible about the time that I come to see the patients.

I have always believed that being a doctor is a vocation, not just a career. Being in a position to help people in your daily work is a great privilege. Volunteering is a natural extension of this.

I also make monthly visits to the Carecorner Senior Day Activity Centre in Toa Payoh. I will spend some time there with the elderly residents, looking into their medical problems and concerns, and if need be prescribing some medications. I have two volunteer nurses who help me there.

CM: What type of cases and issues do you have to attend to as part of your medical duties when you are at the nursing homes?

I see a variety of cases. I tend to acute illnesses among the residents that can range from simple URTIs to more serious conditions like pneumonias and CVAs that need transfer to a hospital.

I also do regular 3-monthly reviews of the

residents, looking into their state of health, and also reviewing their chronic illnesses and long term medications.

I also help with some medical administrative work like helping residents apply for Medisave withdrawals, living wills etc.

A lot of times I just listen, explain and reassure the residents about their health issues. I guess they just need a listening ear.



Dr Leong Goh Han Gregory with nurses and a resident at the Villa Francis Nursing Home.
Image courtesy of Dr Leong Goh Han Gregory



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CM: I understand you took up the Graduate Diploma in Geriatric Medicine (GDGM) years back. Tell us more on that decision.

I chose it at the time as I have always felt a certain interest in looking after our elderly patients in our community. I had a lot of difficulty in managing them at the time due to their long list of chronic illnesses and greatly varying functional status. So I decided to learn more about the subject by doing the diploma. It has certainly helped me tremendously in my practice.

CM: What keeps you serving as a volunteer after all these years?

The people. I enjoy helping people.

It's not just me but the entire nursing team. The nurses and other healthcare staff are the true heroes who look after the residents every day. They are the ones who make a real difference in the residents' lives. They help give the residents dignity and comfort at the last leg of their life's journey. I cannot express how important this is. I am extremely grateful to be able to contribute and play a small, meaningful part in this.

In the end, helping to bring a smile to the residents says it all.

CM: For the readers who are considering whether or not to commit time and effort to volunteering in an area of need, do you have any thoughts to share?

The most difficult part of a journey is taking the first step.

Do not be afraid to try. Each and every one of us can contribute in our own way. Do not worry about having the time or the commitment.

Most organizations are very accommodating.

Just take that first step and do what your heart tells you to.

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CM: What are your future challenges?

Providing optimal care. Most of our patients are very complex and we have to deal with specialists from various disciplines like paediatricians, surgeons, adult physicians, they can be from different hospitals. It is difficult to keep everyone in the medical team abreast of the issues arising and patient care rendered. We relied on email group to handle this. We also hold monthly patient care conferences to talk through the difficult issues. But I feel that ultimately it is the patient and dedicated family member(s) that holds the greatest potential in this.

Keep updated and competent. Dr Tan is trained in many fields. He had many opportunities to learn from fellow doctors, nurses and allied health colleague in family medicine, geriatrics, palliative, rehabilitation and respiratory insufficiency. Dr Tan felt that he is always learning from his patients as health has many facets and presentations. Learning is a continuous and endless progress as he strived to be relevant and up to date for his patients. There are so many things to learn and so many improvements waiting for us to be made.

CM: Any words of advice for other family physicians?

So far we are a small team and we are the only adult home ventilation service in Singapore (HVRSS). Dr Tan is the only family physician in this service. We have answered to a call for help from these patients to address this gap in the healthcare service locally. We hope to impact the joys and skills to all doctors whether they are hospitalists or fellow family physicians. We are conducting a community ventilation course on 5th and 6th July 2013 in AMKCH. We encourage you to register with Felicia by email : Felicia_liaw@amkh.org.sg

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