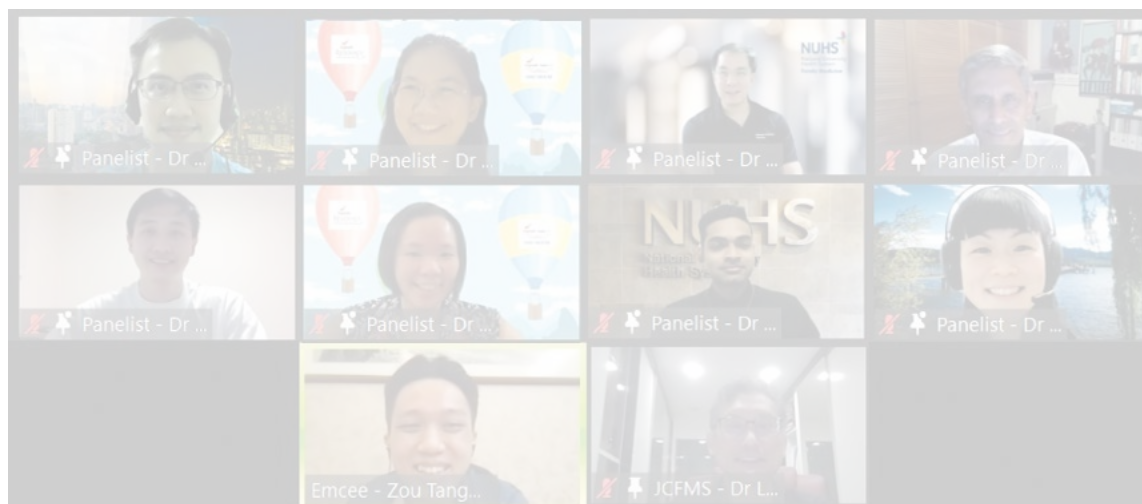


(continued from Cover Page: Primary Care in a Pandemic)



◀ Our esteemed panelists, and our emcee Tangming facilitating the discussion.

▼ Our lucky draw winners with their brand-new stethoscopes sponsored by College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS).

The second segment of the Extravaganza saw a lively discourse between the programme directors, residents, and trainees of various programmes in the form of a panel discussion. The wide selection of esteemed panellists hailed from the National Healthcare Group, SingHealth, National University Health System residencies, and the College of Family Physicians. This year's panel discussion drew on the advantage of a webinar in addressing the attendee's questions, whereby participants were able to poll questions and hear their highest voted queries be fielded by the panel. Despite the limitations of video conferencing, the discussion saw light-hearted, candid, enlightening responses, from delving into sharings of trainees' personal experiences, to frank answers to hotly pondered speculations surrounding the speciality.

The evening concluded with a lucky draw event, sponsored by the JCFMS. The organising committee would like to thank our esteemed speakers and panellists for taking time out of their busy schedules to grace our event, as well as the support of the JCFMS in the successful conduct of this year's Extravaganza. We hope all participants were able to take away a little something for themselves!



images courtesy of DGMS NUS

CM

Telemedicine in SingHealth Polyclinics during the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Dr Emily Lee, Family Physician, SingHealth Polyclinic's Remote Care Workgroup Deputy Clinical Lead

Contributions from: Dr Gary Kang, SingHealth Polyclinic's Remote Care Workgroup Clinical Lead, and Dr Gilbert Tan, SingHealth Polyclinic's Remote Care Workgroup Chairman & Clinical Services Lead

With the advancement of technology and increasing digitalisation of health services, the practice of medicine has significantly changed in the last 20 years. 'Telemedicine' is used interchangeably with 'Telehealth', which refers to the systematic provision of healthcare services over physically separate environments via

Information and Communications Technology. It consists of four main domains: Tele-collaboration; Tele-treatment; Tele-monitoring and Tele-support. Video Consultations fall under Tele-treatment, where healthcare professionals and patients/caregivers interact remotely for the purposes of direct clinical care.

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(continued from Page 5: Telemedicine in SingHealth Polyclinics during the COVID-19 Pandemic)

Telemedicine has existed in Singapore for some years across various medical disciplines, with the National Telemedicine Guidelines being first issued by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2015. With the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst, Telemedicine emerged into the limelight in both public and private healthcare sectors as a platform to provide accessible healthcare services that allow for safe distancing, continuity and accessibility to medical care, and medication delivery through digital innovations.

During Singapore's partial lockdown ('Circuit Breaker') from 7 April to 1 June 2020 to contain local COVID-19 transmissions, SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP) provided suitable patients appropriate top-up of their chronic medications with medication delivery, as well as re-scheduling of appointments and providing tele-support. This was the short-term solution as SHP prepared to provide Video Consultation services for the care of patients with chronic conditions.

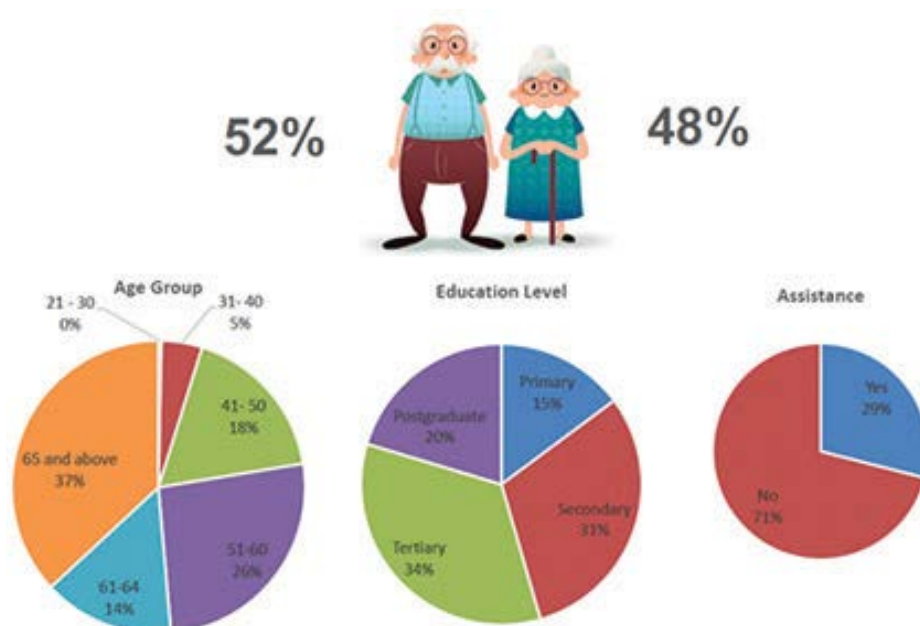
A great amount of effort and time were invested to engage and prepare the multi-disciplinary teams and clinicians across the eight SingHealth polyclinics to be equipped with clinical and operational materials, and to ensure our doctors undergo the 'Licensing Experimentation and Adaptation Programme (LEAP) MOH Regulatory Sandbox' Telemedicine course to safely provide tele-consultation.

From June 2020, Video Consultation was progressively launched in SHP. Within three months, the service was successfully rolled out in all eight polyclinics (Bedok, Bukit Merah, Marine Parade, Outram, Pasir Ris, Punggol, Sengkang, and Tampines) for adults with chronic diseases via the Zoom Video Conference platform, sanctioned by the Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS).

As of January 2021, SHP doctors trained to provide telemedicine have conducted over 1,000 Video Consultations. The service is further supplemented with video-teledispensing by trained pharmacists to ensure safe dispensing, providing clarifications for medication queries and delivery of medications. Wound reviews, which are conducted by our nurses, are also available via video consultation. In July and October 2020, THESS (TeleHEalth Service for Seniors), a Telemedicine service in collaboration with community nurses, was launched at Marine Parade Polyclinic and Bedok Polyclinic respectively to provide Video Consultations at Senior Activity Centres or at the elderly patients' homes. Further plans are in place to extend video consultations to other clinical services such as the Allied Health.

Adopting the use of telemedicine services does come with its challenges, as patients, care-givers and healthcare providers are accustomed to the traditional model of face-to-face consultations. In spite of the initial challenges, the enthusiasm for innovation and perseverance of the SHP team to test, learn and adapt, strengthen our organisational readiness for long-term success.

SHP's initial uptake for Video Consultations was slow, but improved with increased awareness and recruitment efforts. The number of patients consulted by Video Consultations are small in comparison to face-to-face clinic visits. However, Video Consultation proves to be an effective, efficient and convenient platform that benefits patients with poor mobility or busy lifestyles, as well as reduce the risk and exposure to infection during this pandemic.



Patient feedback surveys on Video Consultations since our launch have been overall positive and encouraging. As of January 2021:

- 93.2% were satisfied with the service.
- 94.5% were satisfied with the interaction quality.
- 95.5% found it easy to use.
- 97.2% found the arrangement of the appointment was convenient.
- 97.6% felt at ease speaking to the doctor over video consultation.
- 95.9% felt that the doctor was able to adequately assess their medical condition over video consultation.
- 97.6% felt their privacy was respected.
- 92.8% found that their experience of a video consultation was comparable to face-to-face clinic consultation.
- 95.5% will likely use video consultation for future consultation.

In terms of demographics, 52 per cent were male and 48 per cent were female. Over one-third were age 65 and above,

education levels varied, and nearly one-third required some technical assistance by caregivers to use the Zoom platform.

Telemedicine may not be the mainstream method of providing care in the polyclinics at present, but it has huge potential to advance and mature, and gain more widespread acceptance by both patients and care providers. With the government predicting the possibility of the current COVID-19 pandemic lasting 4-5 years, leveraging on the possibilities of Telemedicine is a valuable modality to extend our care capacity beyond the physical confines of a clinic.

We acknowledge that Telemedicine does have its limitations and cannot completely replace the face-to-face experience, but the future of medicine will undeniably involve technology to augment our clinical practice. SHP's experience of launching Video Consultations was a progressive and promising advancement into Telemedicine, and we look forward to apply new technological advances and explore possibilities in primary care as we support Singapore's initiative towards building a Smart Nation.

■ CM

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Polyclinics
SingHealth

Locations

Bedok
Bukit Merah
Marine Parade
Outram
Pasir Ris
Punggol
Sengkang
Tampines
Eunos (Coming Soon)

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