

there was the Public Health Preparedness Clinic (PHPC) scheme / Flu subsidy scheme to administer, with its own set of guidelines. And not too long ago, Safe Entry protocols and Patient Risk Profile Portal (PRPP) was introduced. It was once again helpful to be in a community of GPs in the PCN. The WhatsApp group was a platform for ideas to be shared, concerns to be raised and quick solutions and answers to be found.

The circuit breaker that stretched from late March to early June, and the months that followed, was a difficult period for most GPs. Patient load was very low as people stayed home and shunned clinics. Health screenings, regular medical examinations and vaccinations were disallowed during the circuit breaker period. Many clinics including mine were able to survive only because of the rental subsidies and wage subsidies doled out during that time.

Opportunities

Despite the many challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic, there were also opportunities abound in learning and trying new things. In April 2020, MOH invited PHPC clinics to perform swabs for suspect cases that fit the swab criteria. After some initial hesitation, I decided to take up the role and have been swabbing cases that fit the criteria in my clinic till today. Testing for COVID-19 in the clinic is a tedious process. There are infection control protocols to adhere to, PRPP forms to fill, and of course the unenviable task of convincing the patient to get the swab done. However, many patients do appreciate the convenience of being able to see a doctor and getting a swab done in the same clinic.

Being a PHPC clinic that does COVID-19 swabs also opened up an opportunity to do pre-departure swabs in August when essential travel was permitted. My clinic was one of a few pilot clinics to offer pre-departure COVID-19 swabs. My clinic assistants had their hands full during those 2 months answering a lot of phone queries and emails relating to pre-departure swabs. That also provided the clinic with a steady stream of income while waiting for the usual patient load to pick up.

Looking forward

It has been about one year and three months since Crossroads Family Clinic opened. I can only thank God that the clinic has survived thus far. There is something truly satisfying about running a clinic and being rooted in the community. I am grateful that there is a steady stream of patients now. It is deeply fulfilling to look after patients and families, gaining their trust and forming long term therapeutic relationships. It is also a privilege and a duty to look after the foreigners in our midst, in particular the domestic foreign workers and the construction foreign workers. In November last year, I was busily managing a dengue outbreak in the construction site nearby. There were over a hundred dengue cases in the cluster and I was managing and following up close to a third of them. The problem was so acute that the diagnosis could be made at the triage just based on patient profile and symptoms alone.

I have come to learn that being a GP in private practice, I have to be nimble and adaptable. There will be new challenges in future. I will have to adapt again when the PHPC/Flu subsidy scheme is withdrawn. I will have to find new opportunities when there is no longer any need for pre-departure COVID-19 tests. I will have to find ways to collaborate when the new polyclinic behind me opens its doors in a couple of years' time.

It is with this spirit of adventure, willingness to learn and adapt, and a big dose of help from Dr Leong and fellow GPs that I have survived thus far. And God willing, I will hang on to these, and continue to serve the community here.

PS. Dr Leong Choon Kit and myself are happy to guide and journey alongside any new/young GPs who want to venture out and start their own GP clinics. We can be contacted at our emails – choonkitaims@hotmail.com, quahsoonwee@gmail.com

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A Day in the Life of My Roommate and I

by Dr Tay Tsang Yew, Family Physician, Tampines Polyclinic

It is seven o'clock in the morning.

My alarm has yet to go off and I am still in my bed, drifting in and out of sleep. My roommate, though, is already wide awake. I hear her scurried footsteps as she goes about her morning routine. I try to ignore the noise as I bury my head in the pillow, hoping to catch a few more precious minutes of sleep before I get ready for work.

Suddenly, a loud rattling metallic sound pierces the silence and jolts me from my slumber. I groan with mild annoyance as I get out of bed and direct my gaze towards the source of the commotion. Our eyes make contact and that's when I start contemplating my life choices.

You see, my roommate is a rabbit. A Netherland Dwarf rabbit to be exact.

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About three years ago I started thinking that it might not be such a bad idea to share my room with an animal. I looked at some listings online and found this cute little rabbit. Upon meeting with her, I decided that we would make great roommates and that was the beginning of our love-hate relationship.

She is not just some rabbit though. Her petite size and golden furry exterior belies her true nature – a destroyer of all things, one who wields perhaps the most fearsome weapons of mass destruction known to man... her teeth.

Almost nothing within her environment has been spared. Everything, from rubber linings to wooden furniture, has been gnawed on. Even my hands have fallen prey to her ferocious bite. She has destroyed no less than three ear phone cables and had once singlehandedly severed the internet connection to my room.

I decided to install some baby fence before she completely demolishes my room. Worry not, for she gets one-third of the room to herself, within which she is free to roam. Her furry paws do not find enough traction on the wooden flooring so I placed a bunch of rugs, on which I sprinkle an assortment of random objects to occupy her (and her teeth). She was quick to stake her claim to the rug by marking several spots with her.... excrement.

I call her Buttercup. But she never ever responds to her name.

She stares back with her large adorable eyes and I heave a sigh, before getting out of bed and giving her a handful of pellets. Buttercup has learnt to use noise to wake me by sinking her teeth into the baby fence and shaking it violently if I do not serve her breakfast on time.



Buttercup is one of the most gluttonous creatures I know, second only to me. She would sometimes charge around the room in anticipation of food. In her zeal to eat from my hands, they have been bitten a few times. Though, thankfully, her bite usually just leaves superficial teeth marks. After preparing a big pile of timothy hay that would sustain her for the rest of the day, I get ready and leave for work.

When I return from work in the evening, I find Buttercup lounging in a corner of a rug, seemingly not paying attention to my presence. However as soon she hears the crinkling bag of treats, her short stubby ears perk up and she springs into action. She watches me like a hawk as I reach into the bag to grab a piece of treat.

She grunts in excitement and darts around as I tease her by holding the treat just a little out of reach. I relent after a while and watch her gobble up the treat like she has not eaten in days. She is never content with only one piece though so I sometimes also give her a small slice of fruit. She particularly enjoys eating the banana. While savouring it, her rear would twitch rhythmically, a behavior some rabbit parents dub the “banana butt”.

I pet her head as she is eating and some fur comes loose. Uh-oh, it is shedding season. Buttercup absolutely detests being brushed so I coax her with more treats. Unusually, she does not struggle as much today and I seize the opportunity to brush her as much

images courtesy of Dr Tay Tsang Yew