

President's Column

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

It's been over a year since the start of the pandemic. A year that has shaken the world to its core and tested societies to the breaking limit. As the global number of infections has skyrocketed with mortality rates in the thousands, Singapore had, until recently, done very well in the world's eyes. We had a remarkable run of several days and weeks of zero community cases and were even lauded for being the world's best place to be for COVID-19. Famous last words, for shortly after that we have begun seeing an alarming rise in community cases. *Deja vous?* A year ago, similar things were said of Singapore before the cases started climbing in the dormitories. We managed to contain that, and it was through the effort of the whole nation, hand in hand with the tireless efforts of our healthcare workers, that made all the difference. Our hearts and prayers go out to our brethren who are making great sacrifices to combat this current surge in cases.

During this crisis, the importance and central role of general practitioners and family physicians have been highlighted as never before. The public health preparedness clinics (PHPCs) have played and continue to play a pivotal role in surveillance, and are at the forefront of detecting potential cases of COVID-19. Without this early warning clinical "radar", the battle would have been so much more difficult to fight. Again, it is the vigilance of our PHPCs who have made the difference. I urge more of us to take up swab testing for our patients. Having the ability to swab on-site for our patients has been a godsend, and I for one do not regret taking up the challenge one bit.

One of the lessons we have learnt recently is that previous rostered routine testing (RRT) may miss new infections. In the recent case of the Immigration and Checkpoints (ICA) officer, he had in fact gone for his RRT on 22 April,

developed a cough on 23 April, saw a doctor on 24 April and by 26 April had developed fever, myalgia and anosmia. A subsequent swab was positive.

It is a timely reminder for GPs to swab all patients with acute respiratory infections even if they had been recently swabbed or been vaccinated against COVID-19, and also remember to give the patient adequate medical leave. For many this is an inconvenience. However, it just takes such a setback to bring us back to reality, to remind us just how insidious COVID-19 can be.

Even as we celebrate the important roles family doctors perform around the world, especially during these COVID times, let us also celebrate with our GP/FP heroes who are at the trenches facing off a tenacious enemy.

As this new situation unfolds, we are rudely reminded that the COVID-19 virus is tenacious and relentless, and does not respect geographic, economic and social boundaries. We need to be on high alert in order to detect and eventually defeat this pandemic. Many of us are battle weary and fatigued, and it is at times like this that we need to be extra vigilant, as the virus will sneak in when we least expect and let our guard down.

WONCA just celebrated World Family Doctor Day on 19 May 2021. Even as we celebrate the important roles family doctors perform around the world, especially during these COVID times,

let us also celebrate with our GP/FP heroes who are at the trenches facing off a tenacious enemy. We need to be united and well networked in order to face off the onslaught. We need to support each other in this hour of need, so that we share each other's burden in order to garner the strength to get up and stand our ground.

Let us therefore stand together as one fraternity, helping each other to run the good race and overcome this pestilence that is ravaging our people.

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