

CLOSING ADDRESS

by CFPS Vice President, Dr Wong Tien Hua

Thank you Minister Tan for delivering the Sreenivasan oration.

I am so pleased to see Minister Tan carry the torch for our fraternity in his current role in shaping public policy - we are very fortunate to have Minister as a friend of our College, he has done so much for primary care in Singapore.



Dr Wong Tien Hua

We are coming to the end of this evening's programme.

It has been a very tough 2 years for primary care but I can say that we can look forward to the closing weeks of 2021 with some Optimism:

- The Majority of our population has been vaccinated and many has had the booster vaccination.
- Our COVID mortality rates remain low and our healthcare system has so far not been overwhelmed.
- Dining for five persons has been allowed and we can once again interact socially with our friends.
- More travel lanes are opening, and quarantine-free travel via land route to Malaysia is now possible, allowing many of our Malaysian workers to return home to loved ones.
- Larger scale events such as concerts are around the corner

It seems as if we are finally able to move from Pandemic to Endemic.

What does it mean for Primary care?

As President has said in his speech, primary care is now at "war" under extraordinary pandemic conditions, our primary care workers are stretched to the limits with many working long hours, dealing with staff shortages and little respite, many have not had the chance to take leave or to go on vacation.

We understand that this is necessary given the great demand for healthcare services, and that most frontline workers are committed to work longer hours and to play their part to help the nation through this pandemic

But a wartime footing has its costs because resources are diverted to fighting COVID, and detracts us from the usual business of primary care.

Because of the pandemic, GPs and primary care front liners have to bear the burden for screening of acute cases, testing

for suspect cases, and providing vaccination for the community.

This means that there is:

- less time for our chronic patients, many who are elderly with multiple needs. We in primary care are asked to reduce routine patient visits by providing a longer period between follow ups visits.
- less time to look after mental health, with many of our patients facing extreme hardships from job loss or deaths in their family
- and there is less time for building a good doctor patient relationship that is critical to changing healthcare behavior. Patient Communication, which we hold so dear, is lost when our faces are hidden behind a N95 mask.

It is my therefore my sincere hope that we will be able to soon return to the regular "business" of primary care.

As Minister Tan has said in his oration, primary care will need to undergo transformation to meet the demands of our rapidly changing demographics - namely the ageing of our population

In the coming months we will hear more about the concept of Population Health - which takes an inter-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach towards improving healthcare outcomes in Singapore.

If population health is to work, we will need a core of well-trained family physicians to take up the role of care coordinators and to manage more complex diseases at the primary care level.

This is where the college has a role to play in the training and skills development of our GPs. Attaining the GDFM, and then the MMed(FM) and eventually fellowship of the College - has to mean something, not just self-actualization. I believe that well trained FPs will have a central role to play in population health in the near future, by being the experts of care of our population across the entire disease spectrum.

Population health also means that we need to consolidate primary care into one seamless system in terms of healthcare delivery.

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Minister Tan said that we need to be able to work in clinical teams to manage more diverse and complex cases.

One other area we can look into is to have more public-private sector cooperation.

The pandemic has shown that **partnership** between MOH and GPs actually **work** and is an efficient and powerful way to deliver care.

During the pandemic, we have seen how PHPC clinics assist in the national effort by keeping patients away from A&E and overwhelming the hospitals. - they provide screening and triage, SASH and testing services, vaccinations and help monitor patients during home recovery

This public-private sector cooperation will likely take on a bigger role in the near future - expanded and enhanced

when population health comes into play, to make primary care a seamless experience to the public

In summary, as COVID-19 shifts to endemicity, I hope to see primary care capabilities freed up so that we can refocus to look after the needs of our ageing population, that we can continue to upgrade our skills to meet these needs, and to explore new models of care that can integrate and enhance our limited resources.

To conclude this evening's 50th anniversary celebration, I would like to leave you with this quote from Minister Tan's Sreenivasan Oration.

"Even as the practice of Family Medicine changes over the next 50 years, primary care will be **evergreen** and continue to be the **foundation** of any healthcare system."

■ CM

President's Column

DECEMBER 2021

by Adj Assoc Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 28th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

2021 has been a momentous year. It started with much excited anticipation as the mRNA vaccines were just being rolled out. These vaccines represented an opportunity for Singapore to emerge from COVID-19 restrictions. Although vaccination was slow to start, thankfully by November 2021 around 95% of the eligible population had received 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. With more and more of the population taking up the booster, we are also seeing a reduction in daily cases which is a relief!

We held our 2021 Convocation of the College of Family Physicians Singapore. An annual event, we had to postpone 2020's ceremony due to the arrival of COVID-19; this year we held a virtual event for both 2020 and 2021 graduands, and welcomed 35 Collegiate members and 27 Fellows. Our heartiest congratulations, as it is no mean feat to be able to achieve this hard earned goal during these difficult COVID times!

50 years ago, a few good men came together to make their dreams and aspirations of establishing a Singapore College of General Practitioners a reality.

In the early days, our esteemed predecessors had many noble ideals. We need to look no further than the articles in our College Constitution to see this. Our founding fathers' first aims were to advance the Art and Science of Medicine, by discussing medical and scientific problems,

and running post-graduate education for general practitioners in the early days, now called family physicians. They were interested in high standards, and keen to encourage and help young doctors to prepare, qualify and establish themselves in family practice. High aspirations, selflessness, and always looking out to advance the quality of Family Medicine for all of society were the hallmark of our College pioneers.

The College ran the first diplomate course in general practice in the early 70's, and the first Collegiate Members of the College of General Practitioners, Singapore were newly minted in 1972, as MCGP(S). They established the first general practice journal in Singapore, then called simply "the GP", subsequently renamed the "Singapore Family Physician". Even in the early days, GPs had much interest in their community, with studies and reviews published in the journal. The College spearheaded all undergraduate and postgraduate education efforts for family medicine in the 1970s.

2021 marks the 50th Anniversary of the College. Although we are in the midst of a health crisis that is unprecedented, we family doctors can hold our heads high, as we have made immeasurable and selfless sacrifices to serve the people of our nation. The pivotal roles we played during this pandemic will be remembered by future generations, and the winds are indeed changing for the future of family medicine in Singapore. One of our aims