

(continued from Page 17: Closing Address by CFPS Vice President, Dr Wong Tien Hua)

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 50<sup>th</sup> 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, 28<sup>th</sup> 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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

is to achieve specialist recognition of family medicine as a discipline. We are very glad for the strong support from the Ministry of Health for this and for the affirmation from our Permanent Secretary Mr Chan Yeng Kit during our Convocation Ceremony in November. I am happy to share that our proposal for Family Medicine Specialist recognition has been approved at the Family Physician Accreditation Board (FPAB). The culmination of a massive effort by all at the FPAB, we are especially grateful for the support and leadership of our chair, DMS Prof Kenneth Mak, whose wisdom and insight was invaluable.

Healthcare needs in Singapore are evolving rapidly. We have one of the most admired healthcare systems in the world, yet we hear of many grouses about the inadequacies of the system. Of particular concern is our rapidly ageing population, estimated to reach 900,000 in 2030, around 25% of the population. These changing demographics are already leading to many more challenges to our healthcare system, and the need for more and better trained family physicians is more urgent now than ever. But how do we attract our young doctors to choose family medicine as a career? Is there a magic formula that can make family medicine irresistible to our newly minted medical officers?

The call for more well trained family physicians is now even more urgent than ever, as well as the need to build up community resources to better manage patients at home. The Ministry of Health in 2017 first noted the concept of the 3 beyonds to make for a "future ready" healthcare system:

- (i) move beyond hospital to the community;
- (ii) move beyond quality to value; and
- (iii) move beyond healthcare to health.

All this has been going on at breakneck speed, what with the myriad engagements of private practice GPs and FPs by the MOH in recent years, and various initiatives like the CHAS and Pioneer Generation health assistance schemes.

Transformation of primary care is key, with the long term goal of "One Singaporean, One Family Doctor". We aspire to earn that "key role of family doctors as a trusted health partner of every Singaporean." We are well aware that as primary healthcare becomes increasing complex, "the professional upskilling of primary and community-based physicians through post-graduate Family Medicine training will no long be optional." These words were spoken by our immediate past DMS Prof Benjamin Ong in 2017. They ring even more true today. Training and upskilling is indeed key to our development in Family Medicine.

The late Prof Barbara Starfield of Johns Hopkins University said so eloquently and I quote: - "There are lots of evidence that a good relationship with a freely chosen primary-care doctor, is associated with better care, more appropriate care, better health, and much lower health costs." Our aging population and increasing chronic disease burden desperately needs well-trained FPs, to take on the mantle and challenge to provide for the health of our nation. With proper costing and adequate funding, a strong primary care system comprising well-trained Family Physicians in Singapore will prove by far to be the more cost effective solution for the health needs of our city state.

As we approach the end of 2021, and look forward to the season's festivities and celebrations, we are grateful for the gentle easing of restrictions for dining and social gathering. This move is widely welcomed, with many of us looking forward to meeting face to face with our loved ones. However the emergence of novel variants of concern and waves of COVID infections in various countries reminds us of the fragility of our campaign against this virus. Let us take some time this season to spend precious moments with our loved ones, it is an investment well worth doing during these uncertain times.

I wish one and all good health, joy and every blessing for this Christmas and New Year!

■ CM

## Do medical students in Singapore want to pursue General Practice and Family Medicine as a career?

by Prof Helen Smith, Dr Fang Yang, Family Medicine and Primary Care, Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, NTU

A research study led by LKCMedicine's Professor of Family Medicine and Primary Care, Helen Smith has found that more than half of medical students in Singapore are likely to pursue a career in General Practice and Family Medicine (GPFM). There were others, however, who are uncertain whether this career path can offer sufficient job satisfaction and career progression opportunities.

The research team comprised of (from LKCMedicine) Research Fellow Dr Fang Yang; Visiting Senior Research Fellow Michael Soljak; Junior Doctor and former LKCMedicine Student Shawn Tan; and former LKCMedicine's Research Fellow Humairah Zainal.

To support Singapore's rapidly ageing population and the increasing need for chronic care, the MOH has announced

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