

Prolonged hours under the sun or rainy conditions seem to be conditions they are immune to and braving them is part and parcel of their job. A common trend for them seems to be the hesitance in bringing up a medical problem with an employer, for fear of being viewed as burdensome to employers or due to being historically refused support. For many, it is a better choice to live with chronic issues such as dental problems, vision issues or even paying for diabetes medication or blood pressure monitors out of their own pockets, rather than seek assistance from the employer. Mental health continues to remain an area of need for workers who have been unable to leave their dorms for the most part of the last 18 months. Regular screenings are required to diagnose underlying chronic issues.

We noticed that many migrant workers were silently suffering with dental problems, excruciating tooth aches, broken glasses, headaches etc. Dental work and eyecare are items that are typically not included in insurance claims and it is very hard for migrant workers to afford to take care of such problems for themselves. Migrant workers are also petrified of voicing such matters with their employers



ItsRainingRaincoat's Founder, Dipa Swaminathan, leading the 'Starbucks Initiative' | Image source: The Straits Times

for fear of having their work permits cancelled, and choose to suffer silently instead. Realising this gap, we have stepped up to offer them help with dental and vision problems. We have successfully galvanised not just plenty of volunteers, but also dental clinics and optometrists have come forward to support us in supporting our migrant brothers. Since these programmes launched, over a hundred workers have sought help, which is telling on the real need to start including such care into their insurance.

Such programmes are not possible without the help of many medical professionals who have come forward to support migrant workers in need. While plans are in motion to provide better access to medical care to migrant workers on a larger scale which will address many of these concerns, we believe every individual can make a difference.

If you would like to support ItsRainingRaincoats in providing help to the migrant workers, do write in to us at itsrainingraincoats@gmail.com

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Remembering Dr Richard Geeves (1925 - 2020)

by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, Past President, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Dr Geeves, a great friend of the College passed on 18th July 2020 in Tasmania. I learnt this while researching the history of the College on its 50th anniversary. I came across an obituaryⁱ placed by his family in the Sydney Morning Herald on 20th July 2020 and a eulogy in the Tasmania parliamentⁱⁱ delivered by Member of Parliament, Mr Julian Lessner on 15th March 2021.



Dr Richard Geeves (Far right) with Prof & Mrs Wes Fabb in Hobart with A/Profs Goh Lee Gan and Cheong Pak Yean

Dr Geeves was a GP in Tasmania and New South Wales (NSW). After he graduated from medical school after the Second World War, he took over his father's GP practice in Geevestown, Tasmania. Dr Geeves later relocated to practice in New South Wales. In an article published in the College Mirror in 2003, Dr Wong Heck Singⁱⁱⁱ, a founder

(continued on the next page)

(continued from Page 31: Remembering Dr Richard Geeves (1925 - 2020))

of the College in 1971 recalled how they met when Dr Wong was in Sydney in 1969 to scout for schools for his children. Dr Geeves who was Dr Wong's brother neighbour had engaging conversations 'over the fence' and rallied his office as Censor-in-Chief of the Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) to help our new College conduct the first MCGP examination in 1972. Dr Geeves and Prof Wes Fabb were our first external examiners. The College awarded Dr Geeves an Honorary Fellowship in 1973 for this sterling commitment.

Dr Geeves pioneered community care for elderly patients in NSW after he stopped general practice. He was awarded the Centenary Medal by his nation in 2001 for this work especially on dementia. These services are now called Intermediate and long-term care (ILTC) in Singapore. Again by serendipity, he was to deliver the opening address of the College first Family Practice Skills Course (FPSC) focussing on ILTC on 27th October 2002.

As then president of the College and organiser of the first FPSC, I did not know that Dr Geeves would stop-over in Singapore while on the way back to Australia from UK. He first went unannounced to the College office at COMB building that day and was re-directed to Woodbridge Hospital, the venue of the FPSC. I remember seeing this tall Caucasian gentleman walked in before the session started. He introduced himself. I connected. He was the Dr Geeves of RACGP, our benefactor for the MCGP examination that Dr Wong Heck Sing often recounted. In the brief conversation before the first FPSC started, I learnt of his recent immersive experience with ILTC in Australia. Dr Geeves on that spur of the moment agreed to give the opening address to share his experience on 'Home Health Care'. I believe that he was sent by providence to be present at the advent of another cornerstone of the college academic programme.

I met Dr Geeves on two further occasions. The first in 2003 was when A/Prof Goh Lee Gan and I were in Hobart Tasmania for A/Prof Goh to receive an Honorary Fellowship from the Australian College. After the ceremonies in Tasmania, Dr Geeves then in his seventies drove us to Geevestown, founded by his great grandfather in the interior of Tasmania. We recounted this experience in the College Mirror^{iv}. From the memorabilia of the College he kept in his cottage and the College Fellowship Diploma of 1973 hanging on his ancestral home, we were sure that he had our College in heart and mind all these years.

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We last met Dr Geeves in 2014 when he was on the way back to Australia after he attended the Centennial commemorative ceremony in Tripoli to mark the end of the Great War in 1924. A/Prof Goh and I met Dr Geeves in Shangri-la hotel for dinner. It was then I first learnt of his award of the Order of Australia for his heroic service in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War – another connection for Singapore.

A Japanese Engineering battalion that occupied Singapore in 1941 was stationed in the pre-war shop houses built by Cheong Chin Nam, my grandfather in 1923 in Bukit Timah. This was where Dr Wong Heck Sing started his clinic in 1952 and where I practised since 1980. After Singapore was secured, that Japanese battalion was moved to Philippine and then Papua New Guinea in the Japanese attempt to invade Australia. On its annihilation, the Japanese archives was captured by the Australian Army. Its sojourn in Singapore were duly documented in history and reported in the Straits Times in 2005^v. Uncanny this was another connection we shared with Dr Geeves.

Dr Geeves was feted by his countrymen in Australia. His contributions to humanity however were larger than life. The Family Medicine fraternity and College in Singapore had benefited from our encounters with Dr Geeves. We humbly extend our condolences to his five sons and thank them and the Australian College for the blessings Dr Geeves bestowed to us in Singapore.

REFERENCES

- i Obituary <https://tributes.smh.com.au/obituaries/137228/dr-richard-geeves/?r=https://tributes.smh.com.au/obituaries/smh-au/>
- ii <https://www.openaustralia.org.au/debates/?id=2021-03-15.211.1;>
<https://www.facebook.com/JulianLeeserMP/videos/dr-richard-geeves/457245272000340/>
- iii College Mirror Dec 2003: <https://www.cfps.org.sg/publications/the-college-mirror/download/48>
- iv Geevestown <https://www.cfps.org.sg/publications/the-college-mirror/download/48>
- v These shophouses were once comfort house in WW II (ST Life Exclusive August 19, 1995)