



COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS  
SINGAPORE

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## INTERVIEW WITH DR YEAP ENG HOOI - Perspectives in the Face of a Critical Illness

Interviewed by  
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Dr Yeap with the loves  
of his life relaxing in  
Perth during one of their  
regular "foodie" trips.

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### College Mirror (CM):

Hi Dr Yeap, thank you for agreeing to this interview. Can you begin by sharing with us your journey as a doctor?

### Dr Yeap Eng Hooi (YEH):

Well, I belong to the class of '76 (University of Singapore) and have been a General Practitioner (Family Physician in 2012) almost my entire medical career. Initially I joined a small group practice but am now working towards retirement as a part-time locum.

As a family doctor the daily work can be mundane yet fulfilling, because every patient brings with them their own unique set of issues. Dealing with patients can be challenging at times, but it is also rewarding as I witness improvements in my patient's psychological and physical well-being. I guess this is what keeps me going.

Another highlight of my medical career is the opportunity to be involved in mobile medical and dental clinics in nearby developing countries for the last twenty years. Together

with a small team of doctors, dentists and volunteers, we worked with local healthcare professionals and NGOs to provide aid to underprivileged people who have limited or no access to basic medical and dental care. However, in recent years as these countries develop, the demand for foreign healthcare professionals has declined as local health authorities become better equipped to handle the country's primary health needs.

### CM:

When we met up last year you mentioned that you had a major operation. Would you be comfortable sharing with our readers what you went through?

### YEH:

It started when I noticed a change in my bowel habits (frequent loose stools) for a few months in 2020, which made me decide to go for a long overdue colonoscopy. The colonoscopy revealed I had stage 3 sigmoid colon cancer, which was treated with surgery followed by adjuvant chemotherapy.

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(continued Cover Page: Interview with Dr Yeap Eng Hooi - Perspective in the Face of a Critical Illness)

Some of the side effects from the chemotherapy were daunting. I had nausea, fatigue and neuropathy (an irritating tingling sensation and numbness in my hands and feet). Thankfully, side effects aside, I was still able to function normally, exercise regularly and eat well, sustained by the prayers of my family, friends and church community.

**CM:**

Can you share with us three of the greatest changes in your perspective of life after going through this challenging period?

**YEH:**

Firstly, I am incredibly thankful to God that I am now in good health, having faced a sudden life-threatening illness just over a year ago. The lesson learnt is that while one has the ability to enjoy the pleasures of life at the moment, one should also have the preparedness and courage to face suffering and possibility of death when it comes, because it is something we all will have to face sooner or later.

Secondly, I have adjusted some of my priorities and am trying to become more caring, patient and prayerful, as well as be more aware of the needs around me.

Lastly, I have become an advocate for colonoscopy as the “gold standard” for colorectal cancer screening for those aged 50 and above. But for people with increased risk, like those who have a family history of colon cancer, they should consider screening earlier. I would regularly advise patient and friends who are 50 and above to go for a colonoscopy if they have not done so.

In Singapore, colon cancer is the most common cancer in males and the second most common cancer in females. Yet despite these statistics, there are a number of people who are reluctant to undergo the procedure and tend to put it off. Some may find the procedure embarrassing in terms of personal exposure. Others dread drinking the bowel prep that tastes like dirty sea water that will keep them going to the toilet. I offer some reassurance that the newer bowel prep is not as unpleasant as it is made out to be and sedation is available during the procedure. I will continue to stress that colonoscopy is necessary as colon cancer is preventable and curable if detected early.

**CM:**

Has your approach to patients and friends who are sick changed after being a patient yourself?

**YEH:**

Having gone through a major surgery and hospitalization for the first time in my life, I believe I am in a better position to show empathy to those in need of medical attention.

My own experience as a patient has enabled me to better understand other people's emotions and see things from their point of view especially when they are going through a health crisis.

For instance, when a good friend was recently hospitalized for nearly four months after surgery due to an accident, I made a conscious effort to encourage him and monitor his emotional well-being.

**CM:**

Do you have any advice for others going through a challenging health issue?

**YEH:**

The brevity of life is an undeniable fact. Life is uncertain – the fact is that any one of us may die today or tomorrow. Being a senior, I have friends who have

suddenly fallen ill or died due to a variety of health issues.

When we face challenging health issues, we need the support and care of people we love, especially our family and good friends. They are the ones who are more willing to share the burden with us in times of crisis, making the journey much easier to bear. I feel that having good relationships with our loved ones are the only things that really matter at the end of the day.

Meanwhile, let us treasure life, be it long or short, endeavoring to live it to the fullest – making our days count, instead of counting our days.

■ CM

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