

Interview with

Dr Rose Fok Wai Yee

Primary Care Oncology (PCO) Education Unit



Interviewed by A/Prof Low Sher Guan
Luke, FCFP(S), Chief Editor

What is your new title/ appointment?

I was recently appointed Deputy Director of Primary Care Oncology (PCO) Education Unit, a new sub-unit under the Division of Cancer Education (DCE) at the National Cancer Centre

Singapore (NCCS). This is in view of the increasing role of primary care in the cancer care continuum, from diagnosis to survivorship, supportive and palliative care.

What are your newfound roles and responsibilities?

My new roles and responsibilities range from developing, providing and supporting quality PCO programmes, to engaging and educating our Primary Care Physicians (PCPs). I'm also looking at establishing and co-creating survivorship clinical programmes and new care models (e.g. shared care models) with primary care partners, to build capacity and capability for community cancer care. My role is also to collaborate and support medical schools and partner institutions in the development of PCO for medical students and healthcare professionals.

Why did you take up this role?

I am passionate about Family Medicine and saw this as a good opportunity to advocate primary care to be recognised as a valued partner and contribute our expertise in the cancer care continuum.

How did you first start off with NCCS?

After practising as a GP for 15 years, I was looking to embark on something new to find deeper meaning in my work. At that point, my fellow GP friend who had just completed her breast cancer treatment wanted to give back by volunteering and invited me to join her. I took on a voluntary attachment with the Division of Medical Oncology at NCCS in 2014 and have not looked back since.

How was the journey with NCCS?

During my attachment at NCCS, I witnessed the strong

relationship cancer survivors had with their oncologists, who traditionally managed the entire clinical care of their patients during cancer treatment. As such, even when patients are in remission, many would request to continue seeing their oncologists for their primary care needs.

However, with the increasing number of cancer survivors with complex multi-morbidities who are living longer, this oncologist centric model is not sustainable.

For example, after completing cancer treatment, cancer survivors may continue to have higher cardiovascular risk and long-term adverse effects such as osteoporosis, peripheral neuropathy and secondary malignancies. Psychosocial needs, including fear of recurrence, relationship issues with spouses and family also continue to affect many patients, even when they are cancer-free.

Against this backdrop, a stronger need to optimise care for more cancer survivors is evident and I believe Family Physicians (FPs) can play a key role in addressing these survivorship needs. FPs take a holistic approach in treating patients and can encourage them to adopt a healthy lifestyle and make behavioural changes. FPs also play an important role in mental wellness to help cancer survivors return to normalcy and transit back to the community smoothly.

As the role of a family physician in a cancer centre is uncommon, many specialists were skeptical and others warned me of the challenges of an uncharted path. Despite these uncertainties, the NCCS oncologists were visionary and welcomed me with open-mindedness and willingness to venture into new domains.

Caring for cancer survivors is unique as a cancer diagnosis is life-changing. Till today, I keep a wooden name tag that one of my late patients handcrafted for me. I learnt the value of life from this patient who battled cancer bravely – amidst the tears and fears when his cancer recurred, he remained calm when the eventual demise was near.

Are there other Family Physicians like you who are with NCCS?

I am the first and currently the only Family Medicine Associate Consultant to be appointed at NCCS. We are building the team and seeking more FPs with special interest in oncology to come on-board.

How will this benefit our family medicine fraternity?

With the official establishment of this unit, it is my hope that it will raise the status of Family Medicine among specialists, and FPs can be recognised as experts who provide comprehensive primary, personal, and preventive care with continuity and coordination of care in the community.

Will family medicine trainees and residents benefit from training in oncology? Are there plans to offer as an elective program?

Yes, training in oncology can benefit family medicine trainees and residents as they learn about the late and long-term toxicities of treatment, build confidence in caring for cancer survivors, and also acquire knowledge on the adverse effects of new cancer treatment and how it affects primary care conditions and management.

We are looking to engage the Family Medicine Education faculty to offer oncology as an elective programme in Residency training. For example, currently the main exposure to oncology for year 3 medical undergraduates from NUS YLL-SoM is a 2-week posting, where students are rotated to surgical/ medical/ radiation oncology, haematology and palliative medicine. This posting comprises ward/outpatient attachments, lectures and tutorials to learn the basic principles of oncology. For students with special interest to delve deeper, elective postings are also available.

How do you plan to push the frontiers in this area of work?

On the education front, we are co-developing an online primary care cancer educational series under *SPriNT to help build FP's foundation in cancer care. For FPs who desire a deeper understanding, onsite clinical attachments at NCCS are available which can help equip them with specific skillsets to gain confidence and competency to better care for cancer survivors.

In clinical practice, we will be expanding cancer survivorship services in the new NCCS building. We envisage this enhanced service to provide holistic biopsychosocial management for survivors who have completed active cancer treatment. A multi-disciplinary team will provide cancer surveillance and co-management of multi-morbidities and long term adverse effects of cancer treatment. This service will also serve as an educational and training resource for healthcare professionals to network and learn best practices in survivorship and research.

* Singapore Primary Care Cancer Network: a collaboration with the division of family medicine, NUHS, the cancer centres, polyclinics, private care network and Singapore cancer society.

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World Family Doctor Day 2022

Panel Discussion

by Dr Chiang Shu Hui Grace
Honorary Editor, Singapore Family Physician
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In the 12 years since the first World Family Doctor Day (WFDD) was celebrated on 19 May 2010, there has been increased recognition of the value of Family Medicine and greater appreciation for the role of family doctors in the healthcare ecosystem.

Family Medicine (primary care) is the foundation of Singapore's healthcare system. Family doctors and their practice teams deliver holistic and personalised healthcare to patients in a "cradle-to-grave" model, providing a comprehensive service spanning pregnancy care to end-of-life care. They also aid patients in navigating the healthcare system by providing appropriate referrals and coordinating patient care with other providers.

This year's theme, "Family Doctors – Always There to Care", celebrates the central role of family doctors in the delivery of healthcare. The fundamental feature of a family doctor's work is continuity of care. Family doctors share a unique connection with their patients and do their best to ensure that they are always there to care by providing accessible

care in all stages of their patients' lives, through moments both big and small.¹

Singapore's primary care ecosystem will be undergoing a major reform in the near future with the aim of being an important pillar of Singapore's healthcare system. This transformed primary care ecosystem seeks to address the challenges of Singapore's ageing population and improve population health outcomes. As Singapore adopts the Healthier SG strategy, this theme of "Family Doctors – Always There to Care" is especially apt. One initiative involves the reorganisation of care delivery and integration of general practitioners (GPs) into the public healthcare ecosystem. From next year, Singapore residents will be invited to enrol with a GP or polyclinic doctor of their choice as their first line of care. These family doctors will support the healthcare needs of these residents throughout their life ("One Family Physician and One Health Plan for Everyone").^{2,3}

The College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) had the opportunity to commemorate World Family Doctor Day 2022 on 14 May with Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Chief Health Scientist [Ministry of Health (MOH)] and Executive Director of MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation (MOHT) as the Guest-of-Honour. The College was also privileged to have the WFDD 2022 Gala Dinner conclude with a panel discussion on Healthier SG comprising following panellists: Professor Tan, Dr Ruth Lim (Director,

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