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It is not always easy to do this in practice, but it can lead to genuine moments of connection and appreciation from both patients and loved ones when they sense your desire to aid them in the way that works for them. When that happens, simple affirmations from them like "You really understand me" or "I am glad that someone like you are around" can brighten my day. I have also seen difficult emotions and behaviours from patients or their kin miraculously dissipate once they get the feeling that you have heard them and are on their side.

What are some of the challenges that you foresee?

Healthcare is advancing far too rapidly for any person to know everything, and on the ground we are receiving patients that are on increasingly complex treatment regimens from our specialist colleagues. My department is still very young in the grand scheme of things, which has both pros and cons. While we have to recognise our limits in certain fields as generalists, it also means we have the chance to learn cutting edge knowledge from the experts in the fields through our interactions with them.

Another potential challenge is working with the healthcare landscape changes that are bound to occur as Singapore embraces the HealthierSG initiative. Uncertainty and

change will be inevitable and while it is understandable why some may experience discomfort, I feel that the need to shift out of our comfort zones can compel us to embrace models of care that were unthinkable to us previously.

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

To be honest, I believe some helpful ingredients comprise of looking out for areas of need, keeping an open mind and working with partners to brainstorm on new approaches or care models to tackle the important problems. For us in OCH, this may mean working with specialists to upskill ourselves and co-manage patients with complicated comorbidities. It may also mean working with community partners in the ILTC sector (e.g. nursing homes, eldercare centers) and serving as a key resource node to support them.

Is there anything else you will like to tell us?

I wish to express my gratitude to the College for this invaluable chance to share my thoughts with my fellow family physicians, and to Dr Luke Low for reaching out to me.

■ CM

Life after Fellowship and Beyond

by Dr Zheng Lifeng, FCFP(S), Clinic Director, SingHealth Polyclinics (Bedok)

I completed my Fellowship of the College of Family Physicians Singapore (FCFPS) summative examination in October 2020. The fellowship programme enriched my life and was the platform that enabled me to forge strong friendships with like-minded peers in my study group and class.

About a year after my graduation from the fellowship programme, I was presented with the opportunity of taking on the role of clinic director of SingHealth Polyclinics-Bedok. I had been working in this clinic as a family physician since 2017. In 2019, I was promoted to deputy clinic director. As a relatively young family physician, I was not certain if I was ready for the role of clinic director. However, my then clinic director, Dr. Ng Lok Pui, affirmed my performance as the deputy clinic director and encouraged me to take on this challenge.

As Lao Tze's famous quote goes, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step", I made my first step when I assumed the appointment of clinic director of SingHealth Polyclinics- Bedok on 1st Jan 2022.

I was propelled by the hopes of bringing public primary care in polyclinics to the next level through improving the delivery of care to our patients. I recall a case of a patient with end-stage renal disease with more than 10 Specialist Outpatient Clinic appointments but he did not attend any of them because of limited mobility and social isolation. Eventually, I coordinated his care with his renal physician and community partners, so as to enable him to age in place and avoid institutionalisation. Practising the tenets of Family Medicine, in the provision of coordinated care in a personalised manner, is essential to enhancing the care received by our patients. I hope I can bring this care to the patients who receive care at my clinic.

My new role comes with new responsibilities of ensuring the smooth operation of the entire polyclinic. My polyclinic is one of the largest in SingHealth Polyclinics with a daily attendance for about 1000 visits. Apart from adult consultation services, the polyclinic also provides various nursing services, dental, allied health services in physiotherapy, podiatry, dietetics and medical social work. In addition, SingHealth Polyclinics- Bedok also offers second tier clinics: Family Physician Clinic, GRACE Memory Clinic, GRACE Mobility and Falls Clinic and Health Wellness Clinic. The clinic is also a Family Medicine Residency Programme training site and it supports various ongoing research projects. Apart from managing the comprehensive range of services, I have about 180 staff under my purview. I

coordinate with various departmental supervisors, such as nursing managers, clinic executives, pharmacy managers and dental surgeons to manage this large number of staff.

Balancing work and life is a challenge I face due to the multiple demands of the role. The dynamic COVID-19 situation resulted in fast-changing clinical guidelines that I needed to operationalise within short notice. Furthermore, the manpower in various clinic domains was threatened by staff COVID-19 infection. In addition, the resumption of “business-as-usual” operation and the development of new initiatives also added onto the rigour of the role. In order to overcome these challenges, I had to enhance my ability to prioritise my tasks. At the end of a long day, I set aside time for my family and self-care. Self-care means to be kind to myself, to remind myself that I have done the best I could in difficult situations and to set aside time to do things I love, such as yoga. I am blessed with supportive parents, who encourage me to persevere in this arduous journey. My peers, such as my friends from medical school, residency and fellowship programme, have made the journey easier. Support from family and peers, and most of the time, just a listening ear, are the best remedies for the challenges I faced as a fledgling clinic director.

The past six months as clinic director were made possible with the support of my clinic, my supervisor, helpful seniors, family and friends. I look forward to pushing the frontiers in my work by working with my clinic, SingHealth Polyclinics headquarter, cluster and community partners to transform our care delivery to bring about better health and quality of life for our patients. We will be working on initiatives for Healthier SG that will enable the patient's chosen family doctor to provide care for him/her with a stronger emphasis on preventive health. In addition, I hope to enhance the coordination of care of every patient through consolidation of management plans to a personalised care plan among all the relevant care providers. I am privileged to have been given this opportunity to serve in my role in this exciting times of primary care transformation.

■ CM

With my extended work family at Bedok Polyclinic



Taking time off work to enjoy a nice afternoon tea



With my fellowship batchmates

