



COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS
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Family Medicine Convocation 2022

IN THIS ISSUE

6
SREENIVASAN ORATION 2022
HEALTHIER SG & FAMILY MEDICINE
BY PROF CHONGYAP SENG

9
ALBERT & MARY LIM AWARD 2022
CITATION FOR PROF LEE ENG HIN

12
FAMILY MEDICINE CONVOCATION
CEREMONY & DINNER 2022

14
HEALTHIER SG
SINGAPORE'S NEW PREVENTIVE CARE STRATEGY
PUTS PRIMARY CARE AT THE CENTRE OF THE
CARE ECOSYSTEM



Adjunct Associate Professor Tan Tze Lee, President, College of Family Physicians Singapore, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

It is my pleasure to be here at the 2022 Family Medicine Convocation Ceremony and Dinner.

This evening, we are witnessing the graduation of 20 Family Medicine colleagues from the Fellowship 2022, 33 from the Collegiate 2022, 12 from the Master of Medicine in Family Medicine College Programme 2021 & 2022, and 167 from the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine 2021 & 2022. I would like to extend my congratulations to everyone. This is a significant milestone in your profession as primary care doctors¹ and is made even more commendable as you had to navigate the stressful COVID-19 situation over the past few years.

However, learning does not stop here. As you embark on the next stage of your Family Medicine career, the skills you have acquired will have to be continually updated to remain relevant. You can also play a part to encourage your fellow primary care colleagues to obtain a postgraduate qualification in Family Medicine to provide even better care for your patients.

Many of you are already familiar with the demographic trends that will continue to pose healthcare challenges. Our life expectancies are amongst the highest in the world. As of 2021, life expectancy for men is 81 years and for women at 86 years². In 2021, the number of Singaporeans aged 65 and above made up almost 18 percent of the population. By 2030, this could reach 24 percent³. Hence, some people may suffer more years in poor health.

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(continued on Page 4)

(continued from Cover Page: Family Medicine Convocation 2022)

It is apparent from these demographic shifts that the disease burden will be a growing one in the coming years. The role of Family Physicians will be increasingly important across various domains, as you provide continuing care for more chronic conditions, palliative care and disease prevention, as well as patient empowerment by providing patients with knowledge to enable them to be responsible for their own health.



I would also like to extend my gratitude to the primary care physicians for their participation in Healthier SG focus group discussions and webinars. The feedback that they have provided has been invaluable and will be of great help in the implementation of the programme.

Some of our primary care colleagues have also contributed extensively to developing Healthier SG care protocols. These care protocols will function as a quick reference for commonly encountered primary care conditions and preventive health strategies, including details on the approach, recommended management, and the required data to be submitted for Healthier SG enrollees. Currently, there are 12 care protocols slated for day 1 of Healthier SG, with more to be added following that. Our aim is that with these care protocols in place, the primary care landscape will be elevated and evolve to be more comprehensive, for the benefit of our patients.

Under Healthier SG, primary care will be transformed to take on a pivotal and central role in preventive care and chronic disease management. GPs in the community have a key position to play in Healthier SG, and we hope that more family doctors will join us on this transformation journey.

Training and Continued Professional Development of Family Physicians

Besides providing care to their patients, Family Physicians also possess another important role, which is imparting guidance and assistance to fellow primary care doctors. The value of peer-led support is especially evident in PCNs, which in addition to more comprehensive management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, undertook numerous functions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College has been playing a vital role in supporting primary care doctors in their professional development via postgraduate training in Family Medicine, which aims to enhance professional competencies by equipping Family Physicians with a deeper knowledge and wider array of skillsets in their Family Medicine practice. The College of Family Physicians organises a multitude of Continuing Medical Education (CME) activities, such as its weekend seminars, for Family Physicians to keep themselves updated on new developments, equipping Family Physicians and primary care

The Role of Family Physicians in Healthier SG

This greater role of Family Physicians ties in with the national Healthier SG strategy. One of Healthier SG's goals is for Family Physicians to provide more holistic care, focused on prevention and improved chronic care, and to build stronger long-term relationships with their patients. Many of you here have already been doing this for years, but we hope more can join us on this journey. On this note, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to the College for being a strong partner in, and a firm advocate of Healthier SG. I am confident the College will continue to play an integral role in the development and implementation planning of Healthier SG, particularly in the development of care protocols, and by working with our healthcare clusters and Primary Care Networks (PCNs).

These care protocols will function as a quick reference for commonly encountered primary care conditions and preventive health strategies, including details on the approach, recommended management, and the required data to be submitted for Healthier SG enrollees.



doctors with up-to-date skills and knowledge. This provides opportunities for our Family Physicians to always be equipped with up-to-date knowledge to better serve their patients.

With this, I encourage new graduands who are not already accredited Family Physicians to take the next step and apply to be on the Register of Family Physicians now that you have attained the necessary post-graduate qualifications. It will go a long way in reassuring patients that the doctor they have chosen to entrust their health with possesses the knowledge and experience to deliver the best care possible.

Serving Patients as Family Physicians

Under Healthier SG, the vision is for One Family Doctor – One Patient, attending to their needs at all stages of their lives and through a variety of circumstances to forge strong bonds and to foster trust between doctor and patient(s). When your patients and their family members encounter any medical issues, they know they can turn to you, safe in the knowledge that they can rely on you to provide the best care possible.

Such trust can only come about through developing long-term relationships with your patients. For many Family Physicians, you will journey together with your patients, and you will be with them through many of their challenging times. I believe that the relationship between the Family Physician and patient is of immense importance.

All doctors, including Family Physicians, must take care to always remember the human element of your work, to treat every single patient with respect and dignity. With the close relationship between Family Physicians and patients, you must strive to uphold the patient's interest at heart. Treatment must be prescribed appropriately, and advice be given judiciously. The importance of trust between doctor and patient cannot be overemphasised.

Family Physicians occupy a very special place in the healthcare scene and in the lives of patients. You are not just a physician. You are a confidant and someone your patients will entrust their uncertainties with, as well as their health. I hope you will hold these objectives close throughout your practice, because as the population in Singapore ages, there will be an increasing number of people dependent on you. I urge all of you to continue striving towards high standards in your practice, and in the training of the next and subsequent generations of Family Physicians, to strengthen the primary care foundation in Singapore.

Closing

On that note, I once again express my heartiest congratulations to all the graduates. I look forward to celebrating this occasion with you. Thank you very much.

References:

1. The title 'Family Physician' is only allowed to be used if a doctor has the relevant postgraduate academic qualifications and experience for accreditation with the Family Physicians Accreditation Board (FPAB) and be admitted into the Register of Family Physicians with Singapore Medical Council (SMC).
2. Source: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/population/death-and-life-expectancy/latest-data>.
3. Source: <https://www.population.gov.sg/media-centre/articles/population-in-brief-2021-key-trends>.

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