

Healthier SG: Pioneering GP clinics

Interviewed by Adj Asst Prof Tan Eng Chun, MCFP(S),
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come and change management in the workflow of the clinic, and more training in and reliance on IT to enable the clinic to do more and upscale our capabilities.

Dr Tan Teck Jack: We have been receiving a lot of useful advice from the PCN management and support staff to help us with the right steps to take. There are many priorities but having a functional IT system and trained staff will help us through the early days of enrolment. Next, I feel, is a system of regular dissemination of knowledge and training of doctors in the practice of preventive health. Change management for both doctors and staff will be challenging.



To incentivise and support GPs in transitioning to the Healthier SG programme, a one-time IT enablement grant and a new Healthier SG annual service fee have been announced. How does your clinic benefit from this, and is there any other suggested support you would like to see?

Dr Wong Tien Hua: We are already using one of the CMSes that has committed to being HSG-compatible, hence it is less of a worry. However, most of our IT hardware is at least 4-5 years old, and it would good to upgrade the hardware. New stations can also be set up in anticipation for more data entry by staff. The IT enablement grant is a very welcome and much appreciated incentive.



Dr Lee Yik Voon: I foresee that the IT grant will be largely used to pay the 2-year subscription fees of the CMS, the price of which has been adjusted upwards due to additional IT functionalities and capabilities for Healthier SG and various other IT support. With the additional admin requirements, I anticipate the need to hire more staff.

With Healthier SG, there will also be various benefits for our patients, including free health screening/vaccinations, zero co-payment for Medisave, subsidised chronic medications, etc. How do you think these would benefit and improve the health of your patients?

Dr Wong Tien Hua: These are perks for patients to enrol with our clinic. There are real and tangible benefits to be had, especially for our existing patients. For example, whereas there were always some form of co-payment with the annual influenza vaccinations, these will be free once enrolment starts (subject to qualifying conditions). These are helpful to improve the “stickiness” of patients to one family doctor who can monitor their health over a long period of time and provide better preventive care interventions when appropriate.

Dr Lee Yik Voon: You have mentioned various benefits for my patients in Healthier SG; however, I feel one of the biggest factors is health literacy, without which our patients will not appreciate any of the benefits and will not be motivated enough to do more for themselves no

On 18th February this month, over 600 General Practitioners (GPs) attended a Ministerial Townhall GP meeting on Healthier SG.

The GP will play a pivotal and central role in this transformation care plan, in close partnership with the Primary Care Network and regional clusters.

College Mirror caught up with GPs who attended the meeting, and had expressed interest in participating in Healthier SG.

Hi Doctor,

Thank you for accepting this interview. You have expressed interest in being one of the pioneering private GP clinics in the Healthier SG programme.

We understand for many private GP clinics, participating in Healthier SG is a major leap of faith forward that may involve some discomfort and painful challenges (e.g., IT issues, drug inventory, staff training). What are your priorities in getting your clinic ready for Healthier SG before the official launch date?

Dr Wong Tien Hua: There is no question that Healthier SG will alter the primary care landscape in the coming years. As GPs and family physicians practising in the community, it is imperative that we participate in this scheme if we want to meaningfully engage with our patients and their families in the future.

One of the key priorities of getting clinics ready is to do a thorough assessment of the current workload and analysis of the pool of patients that we are serving. An urgent but difficult issue when getting involved in the programme is therefore capacity planning, and trying to forecast the potential new patients that may be enrolled. To do this, each clinic needs to have a fairly good idea of the mix of patients that they see, be it acute or chronic cases, and to try to project how many new patients they can then take on as part of the Healthier SG initiative. Many of the existing patients, especially those over 60, may be converted to the Healthier SG scheme in the first phase. The projections will then affect staff and manpower planning, as well as the pharmacy stocks that need to be procured.

Dr Lee Yik Voon: In getting my clinic ready, we need to have the right expectations of the various measures to

matter how much incentives we dangle. Without this basic understanding, whatever we achieve may only be temporary and short-lived.

In Healthier SG, GPs are also called to be involved in preventive care, such as exercise and diet prescription. How would you like to be supported in these tasks in your busy clinic?

Dr Lee Yik Voon: In wanting to do more for our patients such as in the diet and exercise and social prescribing, I was involved in pilot MOHT projects to do holistic management of chronic patients, and employing IT and multidisciplinary teams. With the optimal scheduling of appointments, we can achieve this goal.

Do you have any other input or proposals to ensure Healthier SG works for your clinic?

Dr Lee Yik Voon: One key consideration is we must have the right “heart ware” for HSG to work. At the bottom of our heart we are doctors because we want to provide medical care to help our people and with this is in place, we

hope all other stakeholders would have similar heart ware and together achieve win-win-win for everyone.

Dr Tan Teck Jack: About empanelment: There are concerns on the ground whether it will be a fair process rather than a situation akin to a “land grab” by bigger medical groups or, worse, TPAs. Many GPs also feel torn about onboarding a scheme that has been put together in a fairly short time versus missing out on something that benefits their patients greatly. MOH will need to assure that all clinics are treated fairly from day one, whether or not they are on the Healthier SG scheme. By playing the “long game”, more will join as the sceptics will see the benefits eventually.

About audits: There is a general phobia for audits, from Clinic compliance to Eldersfield to CHAS to the much-dreaded Medisave audits. One would naturally approach this mega scheme with great trepidation since 99.8 percent of GPs are die-hard law-abiding and tax-paying citizens who fear genuine mistakes with consequences from another audit. MOH has tried to address this issue but plenty more transparency and good faith will be needed in the next few years.

■ CM

Healthier SG Prevention is better than cure

by Dr Theresa Yap, Yang & Yap Clinic & Surgery

Prevention is better than cure. This is a belief I have carried with me since young. In terms of a healthier Singapore, I support the initiative of Healthier SG to prevent illnesses and, if already ill, to prevent organ damage. It makes sense to stem the flow from its source rather than mopping up from downstream.

Therefore, I am keen to enrol in the Healthier SG programme and do my part, as GPs are the backbone that will help establish Healthier SG as a success. Indeed, this is a massive exercise, albeit done in stages, and there will certainly be teething problems and other issues. However, I believe we have to get started and iron out the creases as we go along. One main issue was that of remuneration for GPs. After hearing Minister Ong, I know he is genuine and sincere in making this a success and I know he will not let the GPs be shortchanged.

So, what are my priorities in getting my clinic ready for Healthier SG and how can I help Healthier SG work for my clinic?

First, I feel that the clinic staff are most important. They will be the ones dealing with patients who come into the clinic,

especially when the clinic is busy. They will need to know what to do, how to register the patient, how to use the EMR, how to do billing, etc. They will have to know how to answer patients' queries, help patients with enrolling using their smartphones, and more. A well-trained clinic assistant will help bring calm to the busy “market place” of the clinic and give the patient a positive experience. Therefore, training for staff is essential and crucial.

My clinic has been part of Frontier PCN since 2015. We are already using GPConnect and contributing to NEHR since 2012. IT-wise, I feel there will not be much adjustment needed other than to go through the technical part of using the new page for Healthier SG submissions both for staff and doctors. We certainly appreciate IT grants to improve our systems, new desktops and printers, getting good reliable anti-viral software, and help with CMS fees, which are rising.

I believe Minister Ong will be working on the annual service fee and proper remuneration for GPs who are taking this step of faith to help put our nation on the path to good health. In my clinic, we have added another doctor and one more clinic assistant to help cope with the expected increase in patient numbers. Hence, our expenditure has increased. A further subsidy in addition to the \$10,000 IT grant and annual service fee, along with another \$10,000 yearly for the first three years of Healthier SG – as long as the clinic is still providing care for Healthier SG – would go a long way towards helping us defray the additional costs of employing

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