

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 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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extra staff and help us to incentivise our staff for the added work (which may also include longer clinic hours). All these will help until Healthier SG gets running smoothly, especially in the first three years.

Drug inventory is certainly another issue. Using the EMR has helped tremendously in keeping tabs on drug inventory. However, I will use the Healthier SG whitelisted drugs only for those patients with chronic diseases who are on numerous medications. The lowered cost for those with several medications will be a boon for GPs, as many retired and old folks have been lost to the polyclinics due to them being unable to afford medications. Many times, we have to subsidise them ourselves by not charging for consultations to help them tide through till the next year, when renewed CHAS and Medisave become available.

To avoid problems with keeping two sets of drug inventory, I will order these medications for the patient similar to what we have been doing such as the CRISP/DOT/GPCC programmes. I prefer the medications be sent to my clinic rather than the home as I can ensure that the correct medication is prescribed and dispensed.

I have an appointment system in my clinic, and this is an important aspect of my practice. We put appointments as far as possible during the non-peak hours and spread out the patient load, and certainly we will continue this especially with increased patient numbers as Healthier SG rolls out.

The benefits to the patients' health are beyond measure. How can one measure good health? The joy of living till old age with good health, or with minimal illness, enjoying retirement, going places with ability to see and walk, and yes, even talk! Being able to take care of oneself as far as possible, being independent in old age, all these are truly immeasurable. Hence detecting diseases early through screening, preventing illnesses through vaccinations, embarking on a healthy lifestyle through exercise, diets, being cigarette- and smoke-free are invaluable choices.

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However, what motivates the patient to employ healthy behaviour, besides education, is the immediate gratification of zero cash payment from their use of Medisave, the lower drug costs if using the whitelisted drugs, the free screenings, and free vaccinations. This will enable the patient to stay with his/her doctor and continue in their relationship for many years ahead. Using the Healthy365 app has helped my patients log in exercise times to be rewarded with vouchers, which they have redeemed for vouchers at NTUC. I think this is a great incentive for them to have the immediate monetary reward. There also other apps like the THRUST programme, where patients pay a small fee to be guided by trainers, nutritionists, and doctors for their hypertension and diabetes. This can help a busy doctor. It will be good if HPB can help GPs here with a similar one-stop scheme. Of course, IQUIT is a great help, where stop-smoking is needed. Again, the monetary incentive is welcome.

To my fellow GPs who are still considering whether to join Healthier SG: Come, join me in taking the step of faith. You will see rewards both in the immediate and in the long haul. Healthier SG will be here to stay. Patients will know of this scheme as it will be much publicised. They will want to join. At the very least give them the option to choose your clinic. Let them know you're here for them.

On the broader scheme of things, let us all be in the team to help shape Singapore's health. Good health is immeasurable and yet obtainable. Every GP's participation is precious. Together, we can help forge a healthy nation, starting with ourselves providing good primary care, reserving tertiary care for those who need it.



Dr Theresa Yap is a GP and family physician who has been practising for 40 years in Bedok North, running her busy practice together with her husband. She is a mother of three doctors, and a doting grandmother to three grandsons. She believes in continuing education whatever the age and her hobbies include taking vocal training, singing in the choir, and growing orchids.

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