

## A SKILLS COURSE IN DEMENTIA FOR FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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The idea for organizing a skills course in dementia for family physicians was first mooted when a group of us went to Denmark in May 2004 for a one-week training course in evidence-based medicine in dementia at the Lundbeck Institute at Skodsborg, Copenhagen. Besides savouring the wonderful Danish cuisine and enjoying the picturesque canals as well as 'attending' the royal wedding of the Danish crown prince Frederik, we were treated to a feast of dementia updates and cross cultural exchange of ideas. The course participants comprised of a mixed group of neurologists, psychiatrists as well as geriatricians from across Europe, Asia and even Israel. I was the only family physician in their midst although there were a few geriatricians with basic training in family medicine.

I benefited much from the course in Denmark and learnt that it is not too difficult for a family physician to care for the demented elderly. With appropriate training as well as specialist and community support, we can do much in the care of this vulnerable group of patients and their carers. The idea of the skills course was subsequently raised at the College Eldercare Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings and we decided to start such a programme for the family physicians in Singapore.

The timing was excellent as we were invited to join in MOH's initiative to create a national dementia blueprint in June 2004. The blueprint further confirmed the need for primary care

physicians to care for dementia patients, especially with the rising number of older patients in the coming decade. A National Dementia Network chaired by Dr Ng Li-Ling was formed in April 2005 to deliver the recommendations outlined by the blueprint.

Much credit for the organising of the course must also go to the National Dementia Network and her members. Dr Ng Li-Ling was instrumental in obtaining funding for the course from the Ministry of Health. The network members brainstormed to arrive at the present course content with the intention of not only being informative, but also highly practical.

The course is therefore aimed at improving the practical skills and providing critical updates for practising doctors. This skills course is unique in having 2 workshops so as to allow more interactions amongst the participants as well as to discuss practical issues in the care of the demented patient. Through this training programme, doctors will receive the appropriate continuing medical education that enables them to care effectively for people with dementia in the community.

It is also envisaged that the course will also act as a catalyst in raising the standards of care of demented patients through generating more interest in dementia patient care as well as facilitating the formation of networks between family physicians and regional dementia centres for the shared care of patients.

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