

THIRTY YEARS ON

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The College was founded thirty years ago. In these three decades, the College has done much. Much however remains to be done in the development of excellence in Family Medicine as it progresses into its fourth decade.

In the First decade (1971-1980), the focus was on continuing medical education and the Diplomate Examination of the College. The lunch time CME talks became a staple. Dr Lim Kim Leong has more to tell about the CME activities. In 1972, the College Diplomate Examination was started. This examination leads to the Diploma of the College of General Practitioners, Singapore. This is an additional registrable qualification with the Singapore Medical Council.

As Dr Wong Heck Sing has alluded in his narration of the early years of the Singapore College, the experiences learnt by the Singapore College from the Joint Colleges Conferences spearheaded by the Australian College during this decade was to prove invaluable in the next decade.

The second decade (1981-1990) was marked several important milestones. The first milestone in that decade was the College hosted the 10th Wonca world conference in Singapore in 1983. It was then the largest conference ever held in Singapore.

The second milestone in the second decade was Family Medicine was introduced into the National University of Singapore Undergraduate Medical Curriculum in 1987. The Department of Social Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) was given the responsibility to teach the subject as an academic discipline. To reflect this change, the Department changed its name to the Department of Community, Occupation and Family Medicine (COFM).

The third milestone in the second decade was the commencement of the vocational training programme in Family Medicine. The training of family doctors has been a top priority of the Singapore College since its inception. From the initial years of CME programme and the diplomate examinations of the first decade, the College moved into a formalized structured Family Medicine vocational traineeship programme and the Master of Medicine in Family Medicine (MMed(FM)) Examination. The vocational training programme was initiated as a tripartite effort of the Ministry of Health, the National University of Singapore and the Singapore College. The pilot vocational training programme begun in 1988. This became the definitive MOH stream of the MMed(FM) traineeship programme in 1991.

The third decade of the College which takes us to the present, saw consolidation of the vocational training programme in Family Medicine, the inception of the MMed(FM) examination as an university degree, and the commencement of Fellowship by Assessment training.

The first MMed(FM) Examination was held in 1993. Since then, seven more examinations have been held. There are now 140 doctors with the MMed(FM) qualification. In 1999, the Fellowship by Assessment commenced. In the next year, the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine was introduced. The College now has in place training programmes leading to the award of the following Postgraduate Degrees: Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine, Graduate Diploma in Basic Ultrasonography, Master Medicine (Family Medicine), Fellowship by Assessment (FCFPS)

This year the College celebrates its 30th Birthday. As it moves into the commencement of the fourth decade, the visible developmental tasks are in training, practice and research.

There is an ongoing need for the development of the Family Doctor to meet the needs of Singaporeans in the coming years. Training and practice emphasis will be on: continuity care and shared care; step down care for the elderly; and disease Management of common chronic illness. Over the years, learning and teaching of family medicine has become more innovative. Straight lectures have been replaced by self directed distance learning. Face-to-face workshops have taken the place of lectures. Skill courses are in demand. These cover not only psychomotor skills but also cognitive skills and communication skills. The College's training mission is to work with institutions to organise clinical workshops and skill courses to meet the needs of the future Family Physicians in the provision of higher value health care services.

Research in Family Medicine will also be a major academic activity in the coming decade. In this the College will work conjointly with the Ministry of Health and the National University of Singapore as it has done so in the past.

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