

## COLLEGE SINCE 1987

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Dr Matthew Ng Joo Ming and Dr Kwan Yew Seng

### INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the story of the College was told in two papers. The first was by Dr Koh Eng Kheng on its early days<sup>1</sup>. The second was by one of us (Goh LG) on "the present and future trends" up to 1987"<sup>2</sup>.

The story of the Singapore College in the early years is revisited once again in this commemorative issue of the 30th Anniversary of the College from the perspective of Dr Wong Heck Sing, the Chairman of the Protem Committee. His paper is titled "Founding of the College"<sup>3</sup>.

In 1993, the Singapore College changed its name to "College of Family Physicians, Singapore" from the old name of "College of General Practitioners, Singapore. The new name is to reflect a consistency with the label of "family medicine" as a medical discipline.

Fifteen years have since passed. What have been the progress in the things and aspirations described in the paper on "the present and future trends up to 1987"<sup>2</sup>? This paper follows these up and identifies challenges for the College for the future.

### NEW PREMISES IN THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE BUILDING

The new premises in the College of Medicine Building became the home of the College over the last fifteen years. Over that time, the rental has gone from the nominal rental of \$1 a year to market rates in the last 5 years. Consequently, the College decided to return the portion of the premises occupied by the College which was used as a lecture room.

### COMMON LIBRARY & RESOURCE CENTRE

The Common Library and Resource Centre was set up and called the Postgraduate Medical Library. This provided a good place for readers to have a quiet place to study and to refer to current medical literature. The Medline was just being available on CD in the years after 1987 and it was a boon to use the CD version instead of manual search in the hard copies of the Index Medicus.

Today, the Medline is now in the Internet. Many articles are available in full-text that could be downloaded, and printed for use without going to the library at all. With the development of resource facilities in the restructured hospitals, the need for the Postgraduate Medical Library also diminished. Thus, in 1996, the decision was made to close down the Postgraduate Medical Library, since it has served its purpose.

### POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL CENTRE

The College of Medicine Building (COMB) has indeed served as a postgraduate medical center. The auditorium and lecture rooms continue to serve the medical profession well as a postgraduate medical centre.

### A DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL PRACTICE

In 1987, Family Medicine was recognized as an academic discipline by the National University of Singapore (NUS). The Department of Social Medicine and Public Health was given the responsibility of teaching the subject in the undergraduate curriculum. To reflect the new teaching task, the name of the Department was changed to the Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine (COFM) on 13 February 1987. Family Medicine is still yet to have a full department. A paper has been submitted to the Faculty of Medicine.

---

GOH LEE GAN, MBBS(Sing), MMed(IM), FCFPS, FRCGP  
Past Censor-in-Chief, College of Family Physicians, Singapore (1991-1999)

MATTHEW NG JOO MING, MBBS(Sing), MMed(FM)

KWAN YEW SENG, MBBS(Sing), MMed(FM), FCFPS

### **COLLEGE RESEARCH**

Since 1987 the College has embarked on several research projects covering one-day morbidity studies, family values, meal practices, dietary habits of Singapore children up to 24 months, and foot problems.

Two one-day morbidity studies, one in 1988 and the other in 1993, each based on a national sample of primary care doctors were conducted in collaboration of the Ministry of Health's Research & Epidemiological Department. The 2001 one-day morbidity study is being planned.

The study on the dietary habits of Singapore children up to the age of 24 months was carried out with the assistance of consultant dieticians in 1997.

In 1998, the Achilles Project was started with a grant from Janssen-Cilag. This was a study on the prevalence of foot diseases seen by Family Physicians in Singapore. A total of 54 clinics participated in this study. The study found that foot pathologies were less common in Singapore compared to other Asia-Pacific countries. The prevalence of foot conditions was 36%. The major problems were callosities, eczema and fungal infections. In 2000 the College and Janssen-Cilag embarked on a project entitled "Achilles Project 2". This was an epidemiological study on foot problems in general practice. It involved about 50 general practitioners who screened 30 cases each. The project is currently in the data analysis stage.

Several short research methods courses had been organized by the Ministry of Health, Academy and the College. In the space of time, two one-day morbidity studies have been conducted as joint endeavours of the Ministry of Health and the Singapore College.

In 1997 the College held a Research Contest in conjunction with the 6th Scientific Conference. This was aimed at increasing awareness and interest in research among family physicians and giving incentives to those who excel in it. One of the participants subsequently represented the College and presented a paper in the Asia-Pacific Wonca Conference held in Seoul in that same year.

### **VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

The last fifteen years have seen tremendous strides in postgraduate family medicine education. In 1988, Family Medicine Vocational Traineeship programme was started as a tripartite effort by the Ministry of Health (MOH), the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Singapore College. In 1991, the School of Postgraduate Medical Studies of NUS adopted the Family Medicine Training Programme leading to the Masters of Medicine in Family Medicine (MMed (FM)). In 1993, the first MMed(FM) Examination was held. Nine out of the 17 candidates were successful. Since then 140 doctors are holders of the MMed(FM) degree. In 1995, the Private Practitioners Stream (PPS) of Family Medicine training leading to the MMed(FM) was started. Today, some twenty doctors have been trained through this route.

Beyond the MMed(FM) is the training programme to train leaders in Family Medicine in teaching, practice and research. This is the goal of the FMFP.

For the majority, greater emphasis and efforts should now be placed on upgrading the nature and quality of work of the Family Physician/General Practitioner to higher value work. The Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) has been created with this goal in mind.

### **PRACTICE MANAGEMENT**

Practice management is concerned with the strategic and operational issues related to the practice. Committee members represented the College in various MOH workgroups and Statutory Boards in activities to improve the practice of the family physician.

College representatives also participated in the workgroups of the Medical Technology and Standard Committee under the Productivity and Standards Board. These meetings provided an opportunity for the College Council members to have an insight into the ISO standards and how they are being set, applied and review. An area which we were actively involved in were the adoption of the ISO certification procedures of medical devices and equipment. One of our Council Members, Dr Tan See Leng, was appointed to chair a Technical Committee to adopt a set of ISO certified standards for portable home glucose monitoring.

Members of the College participated with senior Medical Officers from HQ Medical Corps

SAF in the conduct of practice audits of SAF Medical Centres. Feedback and suggestion for improvement on design and operation were made after each inspection.

### **THE FUTURE**

The ongoing challenges of the College are to develop its training, research and practice programmes to enable each family physician to level up to be able to do high value professional work beyond the acute episodic medical problems. The College needs to attract capable and dedicated young Family Physicians/General Practitioners who are prepared to sacrifice time and give that little extra effort to serve in the College Councils and Committees.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Koh EK. History of the College – The Early Days. *The Singapore Family Physician* 1987; XIII(2):52-6.
2. Goh LG. History of the College – Present and Future Trends. *The Singapore Family Physician* 1987; XIII(2):57-60.
3. Wong HS. The Founding Of The College. *The Singapore Family Physician* 2001; XXVII(3).