

# Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine

## NEW DIRECTIONS AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE

The College of Family Physicians Singapore launched the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine in July 2000 as a vocational training certification for doctors working in family practices in Singapore. It is a watershed development in the advancement of family medicine as a distinct discipline in medicine.

The days when a fresh graduate after housemanship can practice as a family doctor without supervision or further training are long over. In developed countries, for a fresh graduate from medical school to practice independently in a family practice is unthinkable. Under the present system in Singapore, many doctors are still thrown into the deep end of family medicine without any formal training. As a remedy to the situation, the College decided that it is time to introduce a Graduate Diploma course in Family Medicine that will allow new doctors to rapidly gain the skills necessary to be an effective family doctor. Practicing family physicians will also find it useful training to "sharpen the saw". It is also an opportunity for them to reaffirm their commitment to their chosen discipline.

The third intake for this course will commence in July 2002. The first cohort of GDFM graduates will be sitting for their examinations this year. With the College's meager resources, it would be impossible to start the course without the help of many fellow doctors who volunteered their time and energy to help out as tutors, resource persons and programme developers. Using the model of the Masters of Medicine Family Medicine, the College had approached the Graduate School of

Medical Studies to help conduct the examinations.

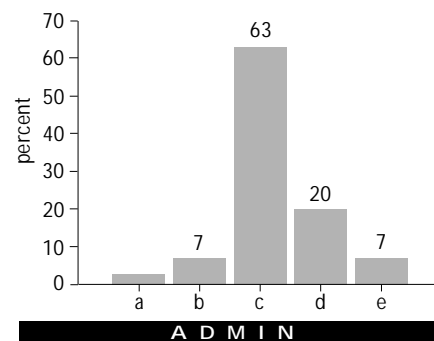
To find out how the course is doing, the College conducted a survey of 41 trainees on the 17th November 2001. They were asked to grade the various aspects of the course. The following were the results: Key: A=Excellent, B=Above Expectation, C=Within Expectation, D=Below Expectation, E=Poor

### Administrative Support

Administration is one weak area of the course. 27% of the trainees felt that the administrative support was below expectation. Staff changes at the Secretariat probably compounded the problem. During certain times of the year, the Secretariat was actually running with just one clerical officer. Compared to commercially managed schools or even public funded institutions we may appear to be inadequate in this area. Looking from another perspective, that 73% of the trainees were satisfied with the administrative support from an under-staffed and under-funded Secretariat speaks well of the efficiency of our staff. Nevertheless, the present state of affairs is unacceptable and the College had undertaken measures to improve the staffing of our Secretariat. Efficiency will be further improved by streamlining the work processes. We are also considering implementing an electronic learner management system when our resources permit us to do so.

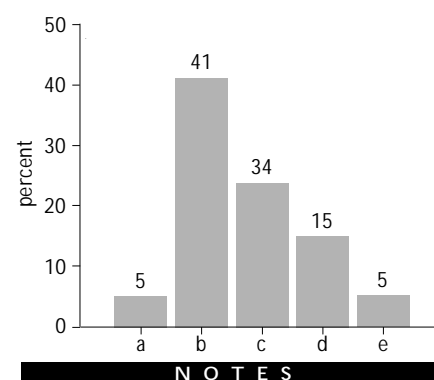
### Course Materials

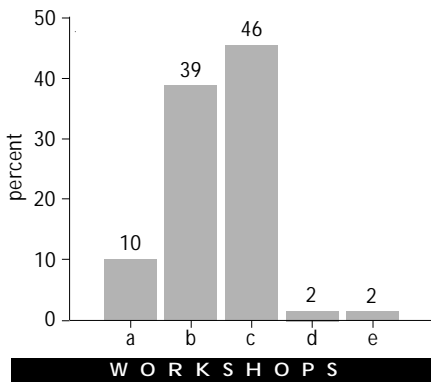
Reading materials and notes was the weakest component of the course. Up to 30% gave it the thumbs down. For



those who gave poor scores in this area, the common complaint was that the notes were often given late, sometimes even after the workshops of the modules had commenced. Another common complaint was the difficulty encountered when downloading the notes from our website. This problem was contributed in part by the frequent change of email addresses of trainees and mailbox quota limits. On the other hand there are many who gave high scores in this area. 5% of the trainees actually gave an excellent rating. Many gave high marks to this component, notwithstanding the lack of punctuality because they felt that the content was very good and relevant to their practice as family doctors.

The College is now considering deploying an e-learning platform to support all our courses and CME activities. When introduced, it will not





only solve the problem of course material delivery but will also greatly enhance the learning experience. Hopefully the College can raise sufficient funds to make this happen soon.

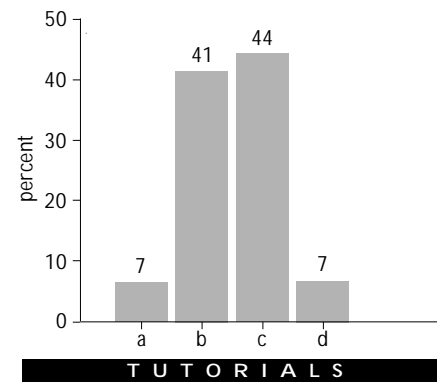
#### Clinical Workshops

The Saturday afternoon clinical workshops were a hit with the trainees. 95% of the trainees gave their approval. 10% gave it an excellent grading. Credit goes to the course developers who crafted the realistic case scenarios. Our specialist colleagues who rendered their unstint-

ing support as resource persons for these sessions must be commended. Many had to shuttle between two concurrent classes. Senior family physicians also sacrificed their precious weekends to help as chairpersons for such sessions to give it a family medicine perspective. It is heartwarming to know that many in our profession are still committed to our creed and are prepared sacrifice time and money to teach their fellow doctors.

#### Tutorials

Quarterly tutorials where family physician tutors meet up with trainee



tutorial groups are very well received. Most of the trainees were very appreciative of the efforts of their tutors. They also enjoyed the interaction with their peers. Many followed up their tutorials with email communications to exchange knowledge and information. 92% of the trainees were satisfied with the tutorials. 48% found the experience to be above their expectations.

#### Conclusion

One and half year down the road, this new course is about to bear fruit. The first batch of trainees will leave their mark in local medical history as the first of many to obtain a Singaporean diploma in the discipline of family medicine. It was predicted that within a decade, the majority of family physicians in Singapore would have undergone structured and formalized training in the discipline of family medicine. In the meantime the College and the volunteer teachers will be facing an uphill task, struggling to find strength and resources to keep this new wave rolling.

**The Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) is a vocational training certification for primary care doctors. The aim of this programme is to train primary care doctors to practise Family Medicine at an enhanced level to meet the needs of the child, the adolescent, the adult and the elderly.**

#### PROGRAMME DETAILS

This is a 2-year part-time programme conducted by the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) commencing in July of each year.

The programme is planned to accommodate the busy doctor's

schedule; the majority of candidates will not need to take leave or time off from their regular work. It is to be completed within 24 months. The GDFM training programme consists of: 8 GDFM Modules 5 GDFM Courses

#### GDFM Modules

Each GDFM module consists of 1 FMMC (FMTP Modular Course) and 1 tutorial based on the theme of the FMMC module of that particular quarter. 1 module would be covered per quarter. Trainees are required to attend all the 8 modules.

The FMTP Modular Course (FMMC) consists of distance learning, 4 Saturday afternoon workshops and

formative assessment. Attendance of the tutorial and at least 3 of the 4 workshops is mandatory for each FMMC module to be certified. The structure of each module consists of 8 sub-modules, 4 in whole person medicine, 3 in body systems and 1 in practice management. (Refer to Appendix A – FMMC Structure)

#### GDFM Courses

The GDFM Courses emphasize on basic clinical diagnostic and management skills essential to general practice and will be conducted in the two years. Each GDFM course consists of 6 training hours conducted over one or two days in the weekend.

The 5 GDFM courses are:

κ Principles & Practice of FM (P & P)

Under the P & P course, there are 4 modules each of 90 minutes duration. Each module consists of 4 parts: Lecture, Workshop, Discussion/Presentation, and Evaluation. The 4 modules are:

*Module 1:* Disease Management

*Module 2:* General Practice Audit

*Module 3:* Clinical Practice Guidelines

*Module 4:* Legal Ethic & Practice

κ Communication & Counselling (C & C)

Under the C & C course, there are 4 modules, each of 90 minutes duration. Each module consists of 3 parts: Case-based panel discussion, Expert Overview, and Skills Enabling Workshop. The 4 modules are:

*Module 1:* Breaking Bad News

*Module 2:* Insomnia & Addiction

*Module 3:* Somatisation & Family Conflicts

*Module 4:* Difficult Patients

κ GDFM Clinical Revision Course

This is a 6 hours course to prepare the trainees for the GDFM examinations. There are 2 modules each of 3 hours duration in this course:

*Module 1:*

The GDFM Written Examination

- Applied Knowledge Test (MCQ), Key Features Problems
- Mock Written Exam

*Module 2:*

The GDFM OSCE Examination

- The Objective Structured Clinical Exam
- Mock OSCE Examination

Trainees are required to complete this course in the same year which they will be taking the GDFM exam.

κ Elective Short Clinical Courses

A short clinical course for GDFM is a 6-hour or more training programme organized by the College of Family Physicians Singapore. It may consist of more than one module or session under a common theme that are recognised by the College as being GDFM short clinical course. These courses emphasize on basic clinical diagnostic and management skills essential to general practice.

Participants are expected to attend at least 1 elective short clinical course a year in the area of his or her choice from those accredited by the College for the GDFM programme.

At the end of the 2 years training period in early June, trainees may apply for a letter of attendance from

the College. Trainees who have completed all the components may submit this letter to the GSMS, NUS to qualify to sit for the examinations.

For those who did not complete all the components, they may apply to the College for an extension of up to 2 years to attend the components that they have missed and hence forfeited in the 2-year programme. A cheque for the fees of the courses and modules applied for must accompany such an application for the extension to be considered. Once the extension is approved and on completion of the remainder of the components, a revised letter of attendance would then be issued at the end of the period.

### GDFM EXAMINATION

The examination is conducted by the Graduate School of Medical Studies NUS and successful candidates would be awarded the Graduate Diploma of Family Medicine (GDFM) by NUS. The examination held on a weekend consists of:

Written Paper	○ Applied Knowledge Test (MCQ) paper (2 hours)	25%
	○ Key Features Problems paper (1 hour)	25%

Skills Assessment by OSCE (Objectively Structured Clinical Examination) (2 hours) 50%

Candidates must apply to GSMS NUS with the letter of completion from the College by the 15<sup>th</sup> June of the second year for the examination to be held in July.

### ELIGIBILITY

The candidate must possess the following to be eligible to register for the GDFM programme:

- κ a basic degree of the MBBS or equivalent qualification registrable with the Singapore Medical Council
- κ 1 year as a medical officer or general practitioner

### FEES

GDFM Programme Fee (payable to CFPS)

College member : S\$ 3570 (covers registration fee of \$50, 8 GDFM Modules & 5 GDFM Courses)

Non-College member : S\$ 3870

Examination Fees (payable to GSMS NUS): S\$ 360.50