



P R E S I D E N T ' S C O L U M N

## **New Milestones in Vocational Training and Continuing Education**

(Based on speech delivered at the Commencement of the Family Medicine Year 2002/3, 29th June 2002)

In the FM year 2001/2, the College attained new milestones in vocational training as well as in continuing medical education of family physicians (FPs).

In vocational training, the College has set up the Institute of Family Medicine (IFM) to integrate all activities leading to diplomas and degrees in Family Medicine (FM). For the first two decades after its inception in 1981, it developed the infrastructure for post-graduate training and conducted professional examinations leading to the award of the MCGP(S). It discontinued the College award when the Master of Medicine was awarded in 1993. However, it is still providing the bulk of the training and contributes to the conduct of that examination. It also developed the private practitioner stream (PPS) by setting up two community-based training centres. The Graduate Diploma programme which commenced in 2000 is built upon these structures. The College successfully concluded its first two-year GDFM course this year and is conducting the first examination in July 2002 under the auspices of the National University of Singapore.

Vocational training at diploma, master and fellowship level is now in place. The IFM envisaged as far back as 1973 by the late Professor Seah Cheng Siang in the SMA lecture <sup>(1)</sup> entitled 'On Specialised Medicine – training and certification' provides the framework. With the additional funding provided by the Ministry of Health to further develop the GDFM, these vocational programmes would be further consolidated. Yet more work has to be done. An advisory panel for the IFM has been set up to advise the College Council on how to further harness resources to enhance such vocational training.

In continuing medical education (CME), the College's role has changed with times. In the first two decades, it was the main provider of CME for FPs. With the increasing interest of the institutions, specialised societies and then pharmaceutical companies in reaching out to FPs, the last decade has seen the College's role moving from centre stage as organisers to facilitators and now accreditors of CME. In accepting the additional role as the sole agency to determine what CME should be for FPs, the College can ensure that CME further level up the practice of FM in Singapore<sup>(2)</sup>.

Membership of the College has increased by more than 100 in the past year. The 1,000 mark would soon be breached. When CME is made compulsory by the Singapore

Medical Council next year, many members would look to the College for leadership not only to achieve their personal quota but also to facilitate quality CME that would directly benefit them. The College is working out its strategies on this matter.

The year 2001/02 would be remembered by the College as a year in which both vocational and CME in FM received a fillip. This is the watershed year in which vocational training programmes and further training through CME are consolidated. The stage is now set for Singapore to move to the next level of excellence, which is the practice in developed countries for formal FM vocational standards to be used as pre-requisites for new members joining their colleges as well as for new doctors wishing to practice independently in the community.

#### REFERENCES

1. CS Seah. SMA Lecture 1973 On Specialised Medicine: Training and Certification. Singapore Medical Journal 472-476 Vol 14 No. 4 December 1973.
2. Cheong Pak Yean President's Column Core CME for the Family Physician Defined. The College Mirror Vol 28 (1) CM 1 - 4 January-March 2002.

**A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean**  
President, College of Family Physicians Singapore

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