

Interview with Graduands 2003

College Mirror spoke to Dr Sharon Kaur and Dr Rachel Gwee who recently completed their Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine and Masters in Family Medicine respectively.

The GDFM started in 1999, is a two year vocational training programme for GPs. There were 17 candidates this year with 14 completing it successfully. The MMed(Family Medicine) since 1993 is a rigorous programme culminating in long and short cases examinations covering the breath of Family Medicine. 20 MMed(Family Medicine) trainees from polyclinics and private practice took the exams with 15 passing this year. With the current batch of graduates, there are now 195 GPs with MMed(FM)/MCFP and 70 GPs with GDFM.

Dr Sharon Kaur Minhas is Book Prize Winner of the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine while Dr Rachel Gwee is Gold Medallist, Masters in Family Medicine for year 2003. We caught up with them in between their busy polyclinic patients to do an interview with College Mirror.



(Top-Bottom) Dr Sharon Kaur & Dr Rachel Gwee at Convocation '03

CM:
Could you tell us something about yourselves?

Sharon:
 I graduated from NUS in 1994. Subsequently I went through postings of A&E, paediatrics, anaesthesia, palliative care medicine and school health services. I have enjoyed my postings and they have given me invaluable experience and exposure to the wide field of medicine. Currently, I am practising at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic. I am married and have no children yet.

Rachel:
 I graduated in 1998 from the Royal Free Hospital, University of London. Missing home, I decided to return to Singapore to do my housemanship. After the first year and newlywed, my husband and I applied for our traineeships - he in internal medicine and myself in family medicine. I then enjoyed various postings in internal medicine, otorhinolaryngology, paediatrics and O&G in my first two years of traineeship.

The wide scope and variety of clinical exposure and experience is something I still draw on in my everyday practice. Then in my

second year of traineeship, new challenge...I discovered that I was expecting. My son was born in January 2002 so he is a year plus now.

CM:
You both chose to pursue careers in family medicine...so let's hear from both of you. Sharon, what made you decide to do the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine? And for Rachel, why did you choose Family Medicine as career path rather than specialising?

Sharon:
 Well...it was continuing education. I wanted to improve myself, upgrade my medical knowledge and keep abreast with current practices so as to ultimately serve my patients even better.

Rachel:
 It started way back as a fourth year medical student... I found the one-month posting I had at a GP practice in London, the most enjoyable amongst all my student postings. It was really challenging.. how one does not know who and type of patient that will step next into the consulting room. I discovered the spectrum of cases a general practitioner had to deal with. It ranged from common respiratory illnesses, chronic illnesses to

psychiatric, psychological problems and life issues. I was struck by how my tutor managed her cases using her understanding of her patients' families. I learnt how a recent bereavement in the family can affect another family member's health ...

In early working years, I concluded that hospital medicine was not my cup of tea. While one has an adrenaline rush dealing with acute life-threatening emergencies, clinic work suited me more. This was confirmed once I started my final polyclinic year! I was happiest in my polyclinic when I got a chance to follow-up my very own patients!

CM:
It is always a challenge to balance studies with work...family life...extra-curricular activities. What factors contributed to you doing well...who were the people who encouraged or spurred you on?

Rachel:
 My mentors and friends who encouraged me and cheered each other on after each "depressing" tutorial when we discovered our gaps in knowledge and skills.

My family especially my parents and parents-in-law who looked after,

watched and showered my son. So he did not get a chance to feel neglected as his mummy was always returning home late from tutorials!

Most of all, my husband who supported by coaching, bearing with unreasonable moods, and believing in me through the MMed journey.

Sharon:

Yes, have to agree... It could not be my efforts alone. Words cannot express the gratitude I have towards tutors who shared with us, never hesitating to spend extra time coaching us and encouraging us.

Of course what also really helped...I felt that the GDFM course was conducted in a very structured manner and certainly catered to the busy GP and was conducted at a comfortable pace over 2 years.

CM:

You obviously enjoyed the learning experience. So what was your greatest gain?

Sharon:

I gained from the Saturday afternoon workshops where we had to discuss problem-oriented case studies. The scenarios presented to us were reflective of the cases we encounter in daily practice. We were made to put on our thinking caps and solve cases in a systematic manner. The holistic approach to patient care which is the core of family medicine was seamlessly incorporated. Never forgetting the patient's ideas, concerns and expectations.

I also felt that the small group tutorials were absolutely fantastic! Our tutors imparted gems of knowledge. It gave me the opportunity to clarify my doubts and picked up practical tips along the way.

Rachel:

For me... my year at Woodlands polyclinic as a final year trainee was the best. Whilst we learnt much through exposure in hospital

postings, now we were the trainees in our chosen field. Tutors were asking us for our needs and tailoring the teaching to us. Our mentors and trainers were approachable and encouraging. I learnt daily through discussions about difficult cases and also through following up my own patients. Developing rapport with my patients and seeing them improve was most fulfilling to me.

CM:

But let's be real, there must have been stressful moments during your course?

"I hope to see a growing appreciation by the public and colleagues of the unique roles that family physicians have. That we can work closely as team of healthcare providers in primary, tertiary or domiciliary care, for patient benefit."

- Dr Rachel Gwee

Sharon:

I guess the most difficult and stressful part of the whole course was the preparation for the exams itself! ... because the topics covered in family medicine is very wide-ranging! However, the mock OSCE helped as it prepared me on what to expect during the real thing.

Rachel:

Hmmm... the "low points"... the beginning of revision for the MMed examination! I didn't know where to start - the theory or clinicals, long or short case preparation, paediatrics, surgery, O&G or internal medicine?! The scope was daunting.

CM:

So Sharon, would you recommend this GDFM course to fellow doctors?

Sharon:

Certainly. It is comprehensive, well-designed, highly applicable to our daily practice.

It is also an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, clarify uncertainties and share experiences to improve patient care and ourselves.

CM:

Question for Rachel, having a busy polyclinic practice, do you think you

will be able to apply what you have learn in MMed?

Rachel:

The challenge for us in the polyclinics is how to make the best use of the limited consultation time. The skill of prioritising is still something I struggle to practice and improve on. Effective communication and picking up on the cues, verbal or non-verbal, that our patients drop, is also key and helps hone in on the real agenda. I try not to be pressured by heavy workloads and see "numbers" alone.

CM:

Any future plans? What do you look forward to see in yourself or the family medicine fraternity in the future?

Rachel:

I hope to see a close knit fraternity- the kind of camaraderie and willingness to learn from each other. Like in the MMed(FM) course experience. I'd love to attend another course like that with fellow colleagues - minus the stress of cramming for the examinations!

I hope to see a growing appreciation by the public and colleagues of the unique roles that family physicians have. That we can work closely as team of healthcare providers in primary, tertiary or domiciliary care, for patient benefit.

Sharon:

Yes, I am inspired and intend to continue my professional development. I am currently enrolled in the NUS 2-year part-time FM Masters programme and plan to take the Masters Examination in 2005 (more stress!)

Yes, and I would like to wish my fellow and future trainees..All the very best in this enriching journey they have embarked on !