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Defining

Family Medicine

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In 2005, an MOH-initiated public consultation on the establishment of a Family Physician Register (FPR) found that an overwhelming majority of both healthcare professionals and the public agreed that family physicians should undergo structured postgraduate training in family medicine and a slightly larger percentage of the same sample agreed with the need to establish a FPR. The *raison d'être* for the FPR is to establish Family Medicine (FM) as a distinct discipline with structured training requirements and to empower the family physicians to play a bigger role in the care of patients.

The College in its long-standing position to work towards a recognised standard for Family Medicine has been conducting the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) and Masters of Medicine in Family Medicine (MMed (Family Medicine)) programme. The GDFM aims to provide a comprehensive training programme for doctors working in primary care so that they can practice family medicine at an enhanced level, catering to the healthcare needs of the child, adolescent, adult and the elderly. It is jointly organised by the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and

the Division of Graduate Medical Studies (DGMS), National University of Singapore. The MMed (Family Medicine) was started in 1992 with the objective of providing doctors with broad-based multidisciplinary core knowledge and practical skills. The aim of the MMed(FM) is to train family physicians who will be on par with the hospital specialists and be able to take on the role of leaders, trainers, and administrators in family medicine development.

The Family Physician Register (FPR)

Broadly, there are two routes to enter the Family Physician Register:

1. The Direct Route applies to doctors with approved medical practice experience in Family Medicine in Singapore and attaining an accepted vocational qualification. This group would include those who have the GDFM or MMed (Family Medicine). The exact requirements will be determined by the Family Physicians Accreditation Board under the purview of Ministry of Health.

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2. The Practice Route applies to doctors with at least eight years of approved medical practice experience, (of which at least five years should be in Family Medicine), and the completion of Accredited Modular Course (AMC). The exact details shall only be available when MOH releases its recommendations.

The College has received confirmation that its Family Medicine Modular Course (FMMC), will be recognised as an AMC for entry into the FPR. Each FMMC module consists of four Saturday afternoon workshops and is run on a quarterly basis each year.

The new cycle of FMCC starts in August 2010. In each module, there will be eight units of distance learning material and four afternoon face-to-face workshops. Distance learning materials are expected to be read well before the workshops and are available on-line. At each workshop, two 'domain experts' will discuss the material covering two units of the distance learning material. This is done via four case studies involving scenarios that a family physician would likely encounter in his daily practice.

With the opening of the FMMC to all doctors, interested doctors may choose to cherry-pick modules that are relevant based on the individual doctors' circumstances, subject to availability of training places. Thus, senior doctors who are

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considering entry to the FPR via the practice route can start attending the FMMC modules to accumulate credits, whilst those who wish to complement their usual CME will find the FMMC an excellent source of unbiased information that is pertinent to a primary care practice.

The College is opening FMMC as a continuing development programme for interested doctors. A CME certificate of attendance will be given if a participant attends three out of four workshop sessions. Cost is \$500 per module. A discount of \$50 per module is given for College members, amounting



to savings of \$200 if one plans to do all four modules, which is more than the College membership fees.

The accreditation of the FMMC as an AMC is certainly a significant milestone on the road to the professional recognition of the Family Medicine standards. It goes a long way in assuring the senior doctors that the years of work experience as a practicing GP has been acknowledged by MOH. Most of all, the previous reassurances are not mere lip service, but backed up by kept promises.

While the FPR is a worthy goal to the practicing GP, the means to attain it must be realistic. For GPs 'drowning' in work to make ends meet, a commitment to sign up for the GDFM, MMed (Family Medicine) or even the AMC is a daunting prospect. A reimbursement of the financial cost of further academic rigours would be welcome. An analogous scheme, applicable to only non-trainee MOs working within the clusters and who are less than six years post-graduation from medical school is already in place. To the family physician, the attainment of the FPR status is a signal of his or her effort to attain the mark so that he or she can make a more productive contribution to society. This recognition must be accompanied by tangible benefits.

In Singapore, good primary care is a public good and the public must recognise that healthcare costs would continue to rise inherently as a result of the ageing population, expensive technology, patient expectations and cost of inflation. Improving Family Medicine standards would be the most cost effective way to move ahead, provided society is willing to pay for trained family physicians.

It is heartening to witness the single-mindedness of the various stakeholders of the healthcare ecosystem towards this common goal. Ultimately, all parties must do what is correct rather than what is popular. Moving forward, Family Medicine would be developed into an inclusive distinct discipline with well-defined standards.

For signing up details please contact the College Secretariat at contact@cfps.org.sg or call the Secretariat at 62230606.

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