



we are proud of our system of "reservist" Family Medicine teachers. Though we also need a strong "regular core", to quote A/Prof Lee. Here, we asked if MOH can consider providing us some resources for our teaching programmes.

Dr Paul Goh, our Censor-in-chief then briefed Mr Chan on the various academic programmes organised by College. These include the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) course, the M.Med (Family Medicine) College Programme and the Fellowship Training Programme. He highlighted that our programmes are recognised internationally. One example being the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners recognising our FCFP(S) designation as being on par with their FRACGP.

Council then had a chat with Permanent Secretary about Family Medicine matters in Singapore. We expressed happiness that MOH is increasingly engaging and consulting with General Practitioners in the community. Topics such as CHAS, daily clinic practice in the various health care settings and better recognition for Family Physicians with higher qualifications were also brought up. College also briefed about Family Medicine teaching, and how we plan, conduct and organise our programmes. In particular,

Being "one fraternity in many settings", we expressed confidence in our programmes in preparing our trainees for work across all our Family Medicine health care settings. However, progress is a continuous process, and we are still continually striving to improve on our courses. Hence more resources would aid in this regard.

Hearing that Mr Chan had spent his National Day public holiday advocating for Family Medicine, we are assured that our new MOH Permanent Secretary knows and feels the importance of Family Medicine along with the complexity of daily clinical practice, in fulfilling Singapore's healthcare needs. We are thus confident that the partnership between MOH and CFPS will continue to grow in strength, as we strive to serve our patients and Singapore better.

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## The Fellowship Journey

by Dr Ong Cong Wei Alvin, MCFP(S), Council Member, College of Family Physicians Singapore

Life is a journey of experiences. On a similar note, so is the experience of the fellowship training, which forms part of the formative training journey of each family physician that embarks on it.

The Fellowship Programme [FCFP(S)], is an advanced 24-month Family Medicine training programme, to prepare and empower the trainee to become a competent consultant family physician.

Prior to signing up for this course, I had my reservations and fear if I would be able to cope with the commitments of the programme, taking in consideration of the need for simultaneous juggling of commitments from work and family.

However, I deliberated on my primary reasons for wanting to pursue this course. I have wanted to advance my knowledge and competency in my practice as a family physician. Moreover, I have also wanted to gain more experience and training in the area of research skills, medical writing as well as evidence based reviews.

The 2 years of training were intensive and covered a wide range of objectives. Quite a number of trainees including myself had little prior training as well as exposure to components such as research skills and evidence-based reviews. Thus the learning curve can be rather steep for those who are new to this field. However, one of the advantages of learning together in a big group was the ability to tap on the strengths of one another and mutual coaching to ensure that no one is left behind in this learning journey.

Our fellowship cohort had one of the largest numbers of trainees. We also had a good mix of trainees from varied practice settings, work experiences as well as seniority. Our learning sessions were very interactive and enjoyable. Each of us also brought along and shared different experiences and strengths. Our group shared many moments of laughter, joy, delicious food as well as times of challenges and difficult moments during our learning journey. One of the highlights of our cohort's teamwork was demonstrated through the organisation of the Family Medicine Teacher's Conference in 2015. During the preparation as well as conduct of the event proper, each trainee contributed significantly to the success of this pedagogy workshop.

I have learnt a lot during these two years of fellowship training. I would like to share and highlight a few of the learning points that left me with the deepest impressions:

### 1) Relationship

As much as the academic learning of clinical practice, scholarly activities and medical pedagogy remain the main focus of the fellowship training journey; I have learnt that the building of relationships and friendships among one another assumed an important role in the learning process. From strangers and mere acquaintances at the start of the course, many of us forged close friendships and camaraderie through learning together, as well as navigating through the many challenges and uncertainties that we faced throughout the course. I personally feel that this was an intangible yet very important experience that we gleaned from these two years of hard work together. Just as how an alternative definition of the word "fellowship" might be defined as "the relationship among people who share common interests or feelings", I would propose viewing this fellowship course not only from an academic excellence perspective, but also from the intangible perspective of the opportunity to forge quality friendships and camaraderie, which would last even beyond the end of the course. In life, academic achievements are important, however, we ought not to forgo the importance of human relationships.

### 2) Collaboration

Just as how professionals collaborate and tap on one another's expertise in the course of their work, it will be important for fellows-in-training to learn and participate in collaboration efforts as well. This helps to prepare for all of us to be effective team workers as well as facilitate inter-professional collaboration in the future. The organisation of the Family Medicine Teacher's Conference in 2015 promoted synergistic collaboration amongst the trainees and allowed individuals to utilise their strengths for the common cause of the pedagogy workshop.

Within the small revision groups, which many of us have formed for the purpose of examination preparation; there was immense collaboration, mutual assistance and encouragement among all members of the group. I am very grateful to have the support and help from my friends in the revision group as I personally have benefited from their collective strengths and built upon the deficiencies of my learning journey.

### 3) Discipline

A high level of discipline is required to remain consistent in meeting the timelines for the submission of assignments as well as to keep up with the preparation for the examinations. It certainly

helped to have buddies as well as individual small groups to keep one another in check and accountable. It also made it much easier to press on when we know that everyone shared similar struggles and stressors in this common journey. This helped in shifting the focus away from personal struggles, to a more constructive attitude of how we could all improve through mutual support and collective hard work.

### 4) Mentorship

The programme supervisors, tutors as well as seniors from the family medicine fraternity played an important role in teaching and molding our experiences in the various aspects of our training. The practice of Medicine itself can be viewed as a journey of apprenticeship, which involves learning the ropes from our mentors and building our knowledge upon their invaluable wealth of experience. Certain knowledge might be attainable from books, however, practical life skills, such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, professionalism, etc. are often most effectively learnt from seniors and mentors. This course also emphasised the qualities of a true leader and thinker, as depicted by the need for good grounding in ethical principles, professionalism, and leadership thinking. I am thankful to all my seniors and mentors who have helped me tremendously throughout the course in these aspects.

Overall, I felt that this course has comprehensively covered various aspects in training each doctor to be a competent consultant family physician. It will be important for all of us to continue to build upon the skills and knowledge gained from this course even after its completion. Another important aspect will be continual contribution to the training of family medicine. Just as how others have sowed and invested their effort and time in helping us, we ought to carry on this tradition in the right motivation, to help our peers and juniors alike. In my opinion, this is the intangible beauty of medical training that embodies the art of apprenticeship in Medicine.

I am thankful to God Who has seen and sustained me through this fellowship journey. I am also thankful to my wife who has been the pillar of support and encouragement for me during these 2 years, as well as all my seniors and fellow trainees who have offered me enormous help throughout the course.

I hope that all of us will continue to practice family medicine at the highest level; while at the same time, contribute to the high standard training of the fraternity, as well as continually seeking to improve the practice and delivery of quality family medicine.

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