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Health Minister Mr Gan Kim Yong (in red) and Minister of State for Health Dr Lam Pin Min (second from left) joined Pioneer GPs and medical students at the SG50 Appreciation Dinner.

Image courtesy of AIC

Singapore Thanks Our Pioneer GPs

by Dr Chan Hian Hui Vincent, FCFP(S), Editorial Board Member

The Ministry of Health (MOH), Agency for Integrated Care and our College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS), co-organized the SG50 Appreciation Dinner for our Pioneer Generation General Practitioners (GPs) on 30th October 2015. This was held at the Copthorne by the Waterfront Hotel ballroom, and it was graced by Health Minister Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister of State Dr Lam Pin Min, AIC Deputy CEO, Dr Wong Kirk Chuan and College President A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock.

Minister Gan aptly summed up the event, when he mentioned that “as we celebrate Singapore’s Golden Jubilee this year, we gather to honour our Pioneer GPs in recognition of your efforts and support of the development of the national healthcare system for more than 50 years.” For example, the challenges of the early years were that of accessibility to basic health care services and how this has changed over the years. Today, Singapore is served by a wide network of private medical clinics spread throughout

the island, providing easy access to health care as well as a “variety of services” given the diverse skill sets among today’s GPs. Minister took this chance to thank all GPs for supporting the government’s Chronic Disease Management Program (CDMP), Community Health Assistance Scheme (CHAS), Pioneer Generation Package (PGP) and Haze Subsidy Schemes. These were excellent programs by which the government channelled resources to participating GPs in order to enhance primary care.

On overcoming the national crises of the SARS and H1N1 outbreaks in 2003 and 2009 respectively, Minister Gan saluted GPs and all frontline staff who despite potential risk of exposure to the viruses, did remain steadfast in duty, until the outbreak was finally contained. In particular, he hailed “our pioneer doctors, (who) in the roles they have played during these crises, have also set a firm foundation for future doctors to build upon.” He

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expressed hope that younger generation of doctors and medical students “(would) be inspired by the dedicated and selfless attributes of these pioneering doctors.”

During the dinner, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan and A/Prof Lee Kheng Hock spoke about how the College of General Practitioners Singapore was formed on 30 June 1971 by a determined and visionary group of GPs, who saw the need to champion academic Family Medicine and raise standards for our fraternity. And how our College has continued to push the boundaries, gaining recognition both internationally and locally. To signify the academic charter of the College, the very first issue of “The GP” was published on 1st March 1973. This was to be our own medical journal, and it was renamed the “Singapore Family Physician” in 1975. Teaching was organized as well, and by 1974, the MCGP(S) designation was recognized by the Singapore Medical Council. College also organized its first major international conference in May

1983, the 10th WONCA World Conference on family medicine. Many other milestones and achievements followed.

Then Dr James Chang took the stage and shared some anecdotes with all about GP practice in those early years. He spoke about how his was a solo practice in a rural setting, where patients were poor and did at times pay in kind. For example, a patient once gave him 2 live chickens which he had no choice but to keep in the toilet, since his clinic session was ongoing. However, another patient had a fright when he was about to use that toilet. In another anecdote, he related about how he had to make an urgent house call at an even more remote location, where after a long car ride, he still had to walk a distance. Herein lies the key importance of history taking, as the patient had complained of urinary retention. He was well prepared, and once he got to the site he performed urinary catheterization with the Foley catheter and the patient was immensely grateful. There

were many anecdotes, and judging from the laughter, these must be stories that many of our Pioneer GPs can relate to.

It was a wonderful experience joining in this appreciation dinner for our Pioneer GPs. I found it enlightening to hear about the history of Family Medicine in Singapore, both from a policy and ground level perspective, and to appreciate how our discipline has progressed tremendously together with our nation. It was also a night of fun, and from across my table at one of the “100% Pioneer GP tables” I could see that they were having a great time chatting about old and new times. Pioneers like Dr Moti Vaswani, Dr Neo Eak Chan and Dr Tan Cheng Bock were among those I could name. To commemorate the event, AIC and MOH presented a custom made SG50 Parker pen for all Pioneer GPs, as a gesture of Singapore’s thanks for their work and contributions.

To our pioneer GPs... We salute you!

■ CM

ADDRESS BY GUEST-OF-HONOUR

~ Dr Lam Pin Min

Delivered by Dr Lam Pin Min, Minister of State for Health



Welcome

Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock,
President, College of Family Physicians
Singapore
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Good evening

Introduction

1. It is my pleasure to join you at the annual Family Medicine Convocation Ceremony. Let me extend my heartiest congratulations to the graduating class of 2015 on the successful completion of their training.
2. Family Physicians are a key group of medical professionals playing an important role in delivering care to our population today. Our graduands now join the ranks of their seniors in meeting the care needs of patients, amidst a growing national chronic disease burden and healthcare affordability concerns.

Challenges Facing an Ageing Singapore

3. As we celebrate Singapore’s Jubilee Year, it is timely for us to reflect on the journey that our primary care sector has taken against the backdrop of changing demographics. Over the last 50 years, Singapore’s population has grown from 1.87 million to 5.5 million. The number of citizens aged 65 and above has doubled in the last 15

years, and is expected to double again in the next 15 years.

4. Given the ageing population, chronic disease management and home care will become increasingly important in primary care.

Accessible and Affordable Primary Care

5. The Ministry of Health appreciates the partnerships of our Family Physicians and General Practitioners to ensure that primary care remains accessible and affordable to Singaporeans. The Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) has been significantly enhanced in recent years, such as the relaxation of the patient qualifying criteria. In addition, the Pioneer Generation Package was introduced in last year in recognition of our Pioneers’ contributions to nation-building, giving all Pioneers access to CHAS. The Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP) was also expanded in June this year and now covers a total of 19 chronic conditions. These enhancements have allowed