

**TRANSCRIPT OF PRE-RECORDED MESSAGE BY PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG
AT THE COLLEGE OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS SINGAPORE'S VIRTUAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY
DINNER ON FRIDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2021**

Adjunct Associate Professor Tan Tze Lee, President, College of Family Physicians Singapore,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening

1. I congratulate the College of Family Physicians Singapore on your 50th Anniversary. This is a significant milestone. I am glad that many past Presidents of the College, the Councils and Family Physicians members are present today. The College's many achievements would not have been possible without your efforts and contributions.

2. Over the past 50 years, the College has played an important role in Singapore's healthcare system. It has raised the professionalism of our primary care practitioners, and helped to establish primary care as an indispensable pillar of our healthcare system.

Combating the COVID-19 pandemic

3. The importance of primary care is most apparent in our nation's ongoing battle against COVID-19. Primary care providers play critical roles at the frontline, identifying and treating patients with acute respiratory infections, administering swab tests and vaccinations, taking care of COVID-19 positive patients under the Home Recovery Programme. These are demanding tasks, but you displayed commitment and professionalism at every step of the way. Your efforts have contributed to the early detection, treatment, and isolation of cases, which is all the more important now as we deal with the uncertainty of the Omicron variant.

4. You have made a key difference to keep our COVID-19 situation under control, prevent our healthcare system from being overwhelmed, and hold deaths from COVID-19 down.

5. Thank you for your service.

Primary Care as Backbone of Healthcare

6. COVID-19 or not, one of the key goals of our healthcare system is to keep as many patients out of hospitals as possible. We do this first by preventing people from falling

sick, and if they do fall sick, we want to intervene early, before their conditions worsen. And where possible, look after them within the community.

7. This is what primary care does best. As family physicians, you are specialists in your own right. Hospital specialists see patients for a specific condition, but you see patients holistically, as a person, across their range of conditions. You are their first point of contact for healthcare matters; you know their medical history, habits, lifestyle, even social environment; you build trust and develop relationships with patients over the long-term, and often also with their family members. You thus deliver key health outcomes for your patients, including by encouraging them to go for regular screening, and to adjust lifestyles to avoid complications. And during COVID-19, this also meant wearing masks and going for vaccination. You diagnose their condition or illness accurately when they present with complaints. You provide comprehensive care throughout the person's life cycle, and within the comfort of their community.

8. We must continue to build up primary care as the foundation of our healthcare system. This is especially important as our population is ageing.

9. Two broad areas we should work on.

10. First, to strengthen the relationships between family physicians and patients. Today, people see different doctors on each visit to the polyclinics, and it is the same for some of the bigger GP clinics too. It would be more effective if patients are always seen by the same care team. The National Healthcare Group has piloted a team-based care model across its polyclinics. Patients are assigned to a regular team of doctors for their primary care needs. The results from this pilot have been encouraging. More of the patients have good control of sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels. Hence, we are keen to explore ways to expand this pilot across all healthcare clusters, and not just in the polyclinics, but also within the wider GP community. This will get us closer to the vision of Family Medicine: "One Singaporean, One Family Doctor".

11. Second, we need to shift our mindset on how primary care services are provided. Instead of just providing healthcare services that are available in the clinic, we should tap on the expertise and resources available in the broader community to expand the range of support that family physicians can provide, particularly for chronic conditions and complex care needs. This means forging relationships with a wider network of partners and professionals, even beyond the healthcare sector. For example, with social service agencies to better support vulnerable families. This is not so easy for GPs who operate in small solo practices to do this, but we will support you in doing so. Under the Primary Care Network scheme, more than 600 clinics have organised themselves into 10 networks to share resources and operate in teams. We will expand these networks, and build closer partnerships between GPs and healthcare clusters. This will allow more GPs to make use of the full range of clinical capabilities and assets

of the healthcare clusters, thus bringing high quality community healthcare to every individual.

Role of College

12. What is the role of the College in all this?

13. It is to raise the standard of Family Medicine to provide continuing professional education, including postgraduate training, to our practitioners; to keep family physicians up-to-date with developments in the ever-advancing field of healthcare. Also, just as importantly, to nurture the next generation of family medicine practitioners.

14. The College can also lead efforts to bring primary care to the fore. Partner our regional healthcare systems, shape a national healthcare system that is primary care-centric and anchors care within the community.

Conclusion

15. The College has done well over the past five decades to build the foundation of Family Medicine so Singaporeans can enjoy better primary care.

16. I look forward to your continued leadership to strengthen the practice of primary care to better meet the needs of our population in the decades ahead.

17. Thank you all once again, and happy 50th anniversary!