

## Interview of HealthServe Volunteer Dr Joshua Lam

Interviewed by Dr Jonathan Yeo Cheng Hsun, FCFP(S)

Dr Joshua Lam is a CFPS member who graduated from NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in 2010. He obtained his Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine in 2016 and is currently a Lead Informatics Specialist at Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS) where he is playing a part in the development of Singapore's HealthTech landscape. Joshua, who is 31 this year, has devoted his free time to helping as a regular medical doctor volunteer at HealthServe's clinics since July 2015. In Feb 2017, Joshua was interviewed by The Straits Times for his contributions to HealthServe.

College Mirror (CM) had the opportunity to interview Joshua (JL) about his involvement as a HealthServe volunteer.



Dr Joshua Lam (middle) devotes much of his free time as a regular medical medical doctor with HealthServe.

### College Mirror (CM):

Please share with us what motivated you to start volunteering at HealthServe?

### Dr Joshua Lam (JL):

While working in the restructured hospitals, I remember a migrant worker who had classical signs and symptoms of appendicitis but left against medical advice because he needed confirmation from his employer that they would cover the hospitalisation fees. It left a deep impression in me that he prioritised his financial situation above his health.

I also realised migrant workers tended to be very ill by the time they presented to the polyclinics. That led me to find out more about the plight of migrant workers in Singapore and eventually volunteer.

### CM:

Does Dr Goh Wei Leong's passion and heart for this group of workers motivate you in any way, and how?

### JL:

Dr. Goh's dedication in serving the migrant workers is truly inspiring. Dr. Goh will always set aside some time in his busy schedule to guide the younger generation of interns and volunteers to think about how to help our migrant brothers more holistically, beyond their immediate needs of medical care, daily expenses and social assistance. He also brainstorms with them to think out of the box in finding ways to serve our migrant brothers.

### CM:

Please describe what areas of volunteer work that you were/are involved in at HealthServe.

### JL:

At the start I was volunteering between twice or thrice a month for clinic sessions at the Geylang and Jalan Papan clinics during which I would see patients for about two hours. Last year, I also took the opportunity to help out as a full-time volunteer in their casework, social assistance and food programme for about six weeks. Right now, I am trying to work on a project where we look into the care of injured migrant workers immediately after receiving acute medical treatment to help them re-integrate back into the community.

### CM:

What motivates/ inspires you to keep on volunteering after so many years?

### JL:

I recently caught up with a friend, another regular volunteer doctor at HealthServe who shared that she felt quite isolated

while volunteering at HealthServe. I was quite perplexed because it was exactly the warmth and energy of the larger HealthServe community that kept me going back! I would recommend any one who is keen to volunteer to spend some time before or after the clinic shift to get to know the full-time staff and volunteers. You never know as you may hear about a project which may pique your interest! Also, the dedication of the staff to achieving HealthServe's vision and mission inspires me to keep on volunteering.

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### CM:

Please share one or more anecdotes from your experience with our helping our migrant worker friends that has made an impact on you.

### JL:

While volunteering full-time doing casework and social assistance, I got the chance to visit a shop-house apartment along Desker Road where ten migrant workers were cramped into. The living facilities were bare; ventilation was poor. They each paid a few hundred dollars a month to stay in that apartment. It showed me that life can get very tough if you are a migrant worker, suffer from work injury and have no income while awaiting for work injury compensation. On another note, while volunteering in the food programme, I found out that some migrant workers were great cooks!

### CM:

After your video interview was published by The Straits Times, how did you feel? Did it motivate you to keep pressing on as a volunteer?

### JL:

Many of my friends and colleagues texted me to tell me that it was inspiring. But I was most happy that we did get increase in volunteer numbers after the video, although we will always appreciate more doctor volunteers, because it will help reduce the workload for each doctor, and allow us to treat more of our migrant brothers each clinic shift.

### CM:

Please share how the training you have received in Family Medicine has equipped you to serve out your role as a volunteer in HealthServe.

### JL:

The training that I received from the GDFM course was broad and yet very practical and structured, something which I really liked. Hearing from our tutors let us learn

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from their experiences as well, so that we are more confident and competent in giving care to our patient, regardless of their upbringing and background. Specifically for volunteering at HealthServe, the lessons related to Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA) taught me how to better help migrant workers know their rights and navigate the system to seek compensation after work injury.

### CM:

How would you encourage more doctors to come on board this meaningful partnership despite their busy schedules?

### JL:

I like how you refer it as a meaningful partnership; while migrant workers benefit from the direct medical treatment and reduced costs of consultation, I think personally I have grown to be more sensitive to the nuances and complexities of issues regarding the unjust treatment of migrant workers, at the same time being aware of a few instances of migrant workers who may be malingering. The whole experience has helped me see this world with more discerning lenses.

Once you get used to communicating with migrant workers, the clinic sessions should be very comfortable (and enjoyable) for those who run general practitioner/ family medicine clinics or those who work at the polyclinics.

For those doctors who wish to spend quality time with their family on weekends, volunteering could be a family activity, as HealthServe needs non-doctor volunteers as well. Maybe while driving past the dormitories where migrant workers live, or seeing them play at the fields outside Chinese Gardens, one could spark a conversation on how these foreigners who have put in their blood, sweat and tears to build Singapore's skyscrapers and facilities and, notwithstanding age limitations, further explore how as a family you could volunteer.

■ CM

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technological advances open up new possibilities in the type of care and the way it can be delivered. Everyone, from GP to polyclinics, have to constantly reinvent themselves to harness, incorporate and apply these cost effectively to stay relevant and on the ground to meet the needs of their community.

## 5 Purpose

Everyone must find that enduring purpose that anchors us amidst the constant changes, challenges and cacophony of noises that pull us in all directions.

And this is what the team at Punggol Polyclinic came up with:

*The Oasis Tree of Health - a place of Healing and Hope for the young to elderly residents of Punggol.*

A tree alone can't do much but an ecosystem of different trees with roots intertwined and interdependent will make a verdant forest providing shade and rest to all.

■ CM