

A Day in the Life of Doctors working at St. Andrew's Migrant Worker Medical Centre

Interviewed by Dr Ng Liling, Family Physician, Editorial Team Member (Team B)

College Mirror (CM):

Hi Dr Pang and Dr Ong, would you like to introduce yourselves to our readers?

Dr Pang Ningyi (PN):

I am a doctor with interest in Family and Community Medicine. I love learning about other cultures and enjoy cross-cultural interactions.

Dr Ong Hui Yi (OHY):

I graduated in 2015 and worked mainly at the polyclinic. I completed my Family Medicine training in 2021. At work, I enjoy interacting with patients and optimizing their medical care. At home, I enjoy baking, cooking, cross-stitching and solving puzzles.



Dr Pang Ningyi, Head, and Dr Ong Hui Yi, Senior Resident Physician, Migrant Workers' Health Services, St. Andrew's Community Hospital

CM:

I understand that both of you are based at the St. Andrew's Migrant Worker Medical Centre (SAMWMC) at Penjurong. Can you describe the services that you provide at the Centre?

PN:

We provide primary healthcare, dental care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, counselling, X-ray and vaccination services.

CM:

What inspired you to work at SAMWMC?

PN:

I had lived in India and Nepal before the pandemic and understand the difficulties one may face in navigating a foreign healthcare system. The migrant workers in Singapore have a lot of healthcare needs that are greater than the average Singapore community partly because they do not understand our system. Lower social status, financial constraints, culture differences and language barriers hamper their access to basic healthcare.

There was a need for doctors to help develop SAMWMC and I gladly joined this meaningful venture.

OHY:

Just as my bond with Ministry of Health Holdings ended and my Family Medicine training was drawing to a close, I received news of this job opportunity where there was a chance to set up a new clinic that would enable me to

contribute meaningfully to a less privileged community in Singapore. It was the perfect opportunity at a perfect timing and so I was inspired to join the team.

CM:

How was it like starting SAMWMC?

PN:

As the migrant worker medical centre concept is relatively new in Singapore, we face challenges in understanding what works best for the migrant workers. Various finance and operational models had to be constantly explored, debated and revised.

Adding on the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and the evolving workflows, we find ourselves in uncharted territories. We have to build not just a pandemic-ready medical centre but also a team with vision to serve and love the workers. It is exciting to see the project and staff pool developing and I feel privileged to be part of this important period in the history of migrant worker healthcare.

OHY:

Establishing an entirely new centre with a comprehensive range of services was a daunting task. There were many requirements we had to fulfil and licensing tests that we had to pass. There were also several stakeholders involved and we had to communicate with each one of them effectively. Despite the challenges we face, we will continue to strive

(continued on the next page)

(continued Page 5: A Day in the Life of Doctors working at St. Andrew's Migrant Worker Medical Centre)

on for the migrant workers who are at the heart of all we do.

CM:

What advice would you give to doctors who are keen to do similar work as yourself?

PN:

Migrant worker work is meaningful and fulfilling. We do not expect monetary gains as we serve workers and employers with financial constraints. If we are motivated by our concern for migrant workers, then it is easier to serve for a long time in this sector. One must also be ready to face challenging situations because there are too many external factors affecting our patients' choices of treatment.

OHY:

One must be prepared that the healthcare system for migrant workers is less well-established and hence not as systematic and organized as our public healthcare sector. We constantly have to navigate through uncharted territories which is daunting but yet fulfilling. While there may not be much financial gain as compared to that of the private healthcare sector, the spiritual and emotional gains, as well as unique job challenges and experiences, are abundant.

CM:

How do you foresee the landscape of primary care provided to migrant workers evolve in the future?

PN:

This landscape is rapidly evolving because of the government's current focus on the new health system for migrant workers. I foresee it developing into a more comprehensive system where workers can readily access quality and affordable healthcare. It will be a fulfilment of the dreams of many who have strived hard to serve the migrant workers.

OHY:

I hope that we can strive towards providing the workers with the same standard of medical care that the rest of the general population enjoy at an affordable rate.

CM:

Thank you very much for your sharing and nuggets of wisdom for those who wish to join you in your work.

■ CM

The Singapore General Hospital COVID Virtual Ward

by Dr Tan Woei Jen, Michelle, Family Physician

The Singapore General Hospital (SGH) COVID Virtual Ward is an initiative by the Department of Family Medicine and Continuing Care (FMCC) and the Population Health Office and Integrated Care Office (PHICO), to support the safe recovery of higher risk COVID-19 patients in their own homes. The programme serves to expand the capacity of COVID-19 isolation wards in SGH, whether through early discharge of existing inpatients, or through direct admission of community cases into the Virtual Ward. In order for patients to recover at home, our medical staff remotely monitors these patients for signs of deterioration, and manages minor medical issues that would otherwise compel these patients to return to the hospital. Our focus is on patients who are not eligible for the current Home Recovery Programme (HRP) or Community Isolation Facilities (CIF).

The FMCC, in partnership with the PHICO, have long been the drivers for transitional care services in SGH. In fact, the COVID Virtual Ward is an extension of SGH@Home, our existing "hospital at home" service. The pivot to COVID-19 patients was made at the request of the Ministry of Health

(MOH) in mid-September 2021, in the face of an exponential increase in the number of SARS-CoV-2 infections in the community due to the Delta variant. The COVID Virtual Ward was opened on 6th October 2021 and the first patients were admitted into the programme shortly after. The primary team for the Virtual Ward has the capacity to care for up to 100 patients simultaneously, and currently includes a Consultant Physician, Four Resident Physicians and Medical Officers, as well as a Nurse Clinician and five Staff Nurses.

The inclusion criteria is deliberately broad (see table 1), and encompasses patients 18 years or older with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 symptoms and otherwise stable co-morbid medical issues. Conversely, the exclusion criteria is quite narrow, barring patients with active medical issues that requires inpatient care or those with logistical issues that cannot be managed in the community (eg hemodialysis). SGH inpatients may be referred to FMCC for an assessment on their suitability, based on the patient's medical condition, social support and home environment. Patients must also be keen and ready to return home, and informed consent