



P R E S I D E N T ' S C O L U M N

The Institute of Family Medicine – 30 years in the making

Since its inception 30 years ago, the College has set its sight that an academic institute would eventually be established to propel the standards and practice of Family Medicine (FM) to a yet higher plane of excellence. This is not only the aspiration of the College and the FM fraternity, but that of the whole medical profession in Singapore as stated in 1973 by the late Professor Seah Cheng Siang, past master of the Academy of Medicine Singapore.

In the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) Lecture of 1973⁽¹⁾, he said that Singapore “took a significant step forward when they formed the College of General Practitioners with the dual objectives of maintaining high standards of practice as well as to provide for a continuing education. It also held the first examination, leading to its membership diploma. This is a move in the right direction. I suggest that the Association together with the College can now, with advantage, look into the matter of forming an Institute of General Practice.”

The 30th AGM of the College held on 24th June 2001 provided the impetus by resolving that the College Council set up a foundation to promote FM education in Singapore. After seeking advice from senior members of the College and other authorities, the Council resolved that the step ahead is first to set up the Institute of Family Medicine as a private limited company, then apply for tax exempt status accorded to such foundations for its role as an educational institute for public good.

At a meeting of the 18th College Council on 8th February 2002, which was attended also by Dr Wong Heck Sing, the College's founding father and College President in 1973, the College appointed Dr Wong to be the pro-tem chairman of the Board of Advisors to engender support for the Institute. Historically, Dr Wong chaired the original committee that founded the College in 1971.

As to the structure of the Institute, the late Professor Seah advised “A vocational structure as suggested in the foregoing will require an academic structure. The creation of such an Institute will serve a number of useful functions. Staffed at the centre by a Director, two or three other general practitioners, a statistician, a sociologist and part-time service of active practitioners, this could contribute significantly both to teaching and to research. It can also establish and co-ordinate epidemiological and clinical data and conduct operational studies of the type and on scales required but which have not been undertaken. Further, the

Institute can initiate studies on what is the best training for the general practitioner of the future, regardless of whether or not the ideals can yet be achieved.”

Some aspects of how best the Institute could be structured may have changed with time. The principles of his vision however remain valid. The Council would work out the operational details in setting up this Institute of Family Medicine in consultation with the FM fraternity, the medical profession and the authorities.

With this Institute, FM would be poised to scale greater heights. Firstly, the vision of this Institute would be to enable every doctor in Singapore to be a vocationally well-trained doctor. This must of need include every family physician, as our FM fraternity comprises at least 60% of all doctors in Singapore. Secondly, FM will be the integrating factor that bridges and glues the disparate elements of healthcare. Thirdly, the Institute will promote the image of the trained FM as the pivot of an integrated and thereby cost-effective system.

REFERENCE

1. C S Seah. SMA Lecture 1973 On Specialised Medicine: Training and Certification. Singapore Medical Journal 472-476 Vol 14 No. 4 December 1973.

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean
President, College of Family Physicians, Singapore

F R O M T H E E D I T O R ' S D E S K

If you have been keeping track of the College's activities, you might notice that the College has been organising numerous CME activities such as talks and skills courses for the family physicians. The College has always been on the forefront, encouraging family physicians to enhance their professionalism in the Family Medicine field continuously.

From the last quarter of 2001, the College has been producing a quarterly CME calendar for family physicians. Besides ensuring that family physicians are kept up-to-date on the ongoing CME activities relevant to them, the College and its co-organisers also make efforts to plan such activities beyond the doctors' practice hours, making it convenient for them to attend.

Furthering to this, the College also organises or co-organises postgraduate vocational education leading to the Graduate Diploma, Masters and Fellowship awards in Family Medicine.

To get a better understanding of the Graduate Diploma and CME activities organised by the College, read on to find out what the GDFM trainees have to say about the GDFM programme and CME activities!

Ms Emily Lim
Administrative Executive

NEWS FROM THE COLLEGE



CLASS HELD AT THE LECTURE ROOM

New Additions: College's Lecture & Reading Room

Renovations of the College are finally complete!

The premise has been reorganised to include a new lecture room and reading room, in addition to the President's room and Secretariat office. With a seating capacity of up to 65 people, the lecture room facilitates the College in organising more CME activities for the family physicians. The reading room replaces the College's previous library and is open to all College members.

For organisers interested in holding their CME activities in our lecture room, please contact the College Secretariat at 6223 0606 or email us at contact@cfps.org.sg for more information.

FROM TOP (CLOCKWISE):
KATY CHAN, CHRISTINA CHEONG
AND EMILY LIM



New Staff @College Secretariat

Emily Lim joined the College as Administrative Executive as of 2nd January 2002 and would be involved in managing the College's structured programmes. Emily graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the National University of Singapore. Since graduation, she had worked in various organisations in the health care industry. She had been involved in both product and business development roles in various healthcare related info-communication companies. Emily has a special interest in information technology. She will be leading the College's efforts in upgrading and maintaining our website.

CME On-Line is Off-Line again

Like a bad modem connection, the CME On-Line is sputtering on and off despite the valiant attempts of many volunteer writers and programme developers. A/Prof Goh Lee Gan and Dr Lee Kheng Hock leading a team of very hard working programme developers (Dr Kiran Kashyap, Dr Liao Kian Huat, Dr Lawrence Soh Hun Beng, Dr Matthew Ng, Dr Loong Tze Wey, Dr Loke Kam Weng, Dr Tan Boon Yeow, Dr Lawrence Ng Chee Lian and Dr Tan Ngiap Chuan) had struggled for more than a year to make this project work.

Unfortunately, the College does not have the financial resources or the technical expertise to manage the project by ourselves. We entered into a partnership with World Health Network who very generously agreed to fund the programme and provide the technical solutions. Unfortunately, they ceased their operations in Singapore very abruptly due to the poor economic climate. So it is back to the drawing board again.

Things are looking up. We have recruited more dedicated volunteers to join the team. The 2001 Fellowship training group had been mustered to provide more brain power for the programme. The College is in discussion with a few very promising e-learning application service providers. The only problem holding back the project is a serious deficiency of Vitamin M. Nevertheless, the College is determined to make all efforts to launch the project by 2002. In the meantime, let us hope for a quick recovery for our economy. By the way, anybody has a \$100,000 to spare for a good cause?

NOTES

We welcome your letters and contributions. You may write almost anything that is of interest to your fellow family physicians. Please address your correspondence to:

The Editor

The College Mirror

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Doctor's Feedback on College's CME Activities & GDFM Programme

As part of our continuing efforts to stay relevant to our Members' needs, the College Mirror asked some of our Members for their comments on the College's CME activities and the GDFM programme. Dr See Toh Kwok Yee graduated in 1987 and is practising as solo family physician. Dr Sarani Bte Omar graduated with a MBBS in 1985 and FFAI in 1990 and currently runs her own practice. Dr Anbumalar Ramiah graduated with a MBChB in 1995 and Dr Teo Yii Jin graduated in 1997 with a MBBch, BAO (Ireland).

College's CME Events

College Mirror:

How do you find the CME events organised by the college?

Dr See Toh :

The College's Continuing Medical Education Committee has always been at the forefront encouraging and providing relevant CME programs for the family physicians. Over the years, these events have helped empower us to reach our professional and personal goals by giving us access to some of the best lecturers and courses.

Dr Sarani :

They are generally informative and up-to-date.

Dr Teo :

The topics are varied and most of the speakers are very interesting. They allow me to update myself on the latest interventions and the ability to interact with the speakers is

a great advantage over learning from static means like textbooks or the internet.

Dr Anbumalar :

The topics covered under the CME events are extremely useful, particularly the Updates.

College Mirror:

In what ways do you find them beneficial?

Dr See Toh :

First of all, the selection of the topics and subject matters are relevant to my work as a Family Physician. Secondly, the considerate scheduling of the CME events permit busy doctors like myself to attend. Thirdly, such events provide an opportunity to interact with other like-minded fellow family physicians to exchange views and to enjoy the camaraderie.

Dr Sarani :

Keep us up-to-date and help in our judgement and assessment of our patients.

Dr Teo :

Many of the CMEs conducted by professional medical bodies are catered towards tertiary care and not towards Primary Care. I think that the CMEs conducted by the College are far more relevant to the family physician. The opportunity to interact with other family physicians is also beneficial as we are able to discuss and compare management of "difficult cases" that we face in our practice.

Dr Anbumalar :

They cover the relevant topics quickly and adequately without dwelling too much into the details. These topics are also relevant to the GP practice. Moreover, the lecturers and speakers were good.

College Mirror:

Which topic areas would you like to see CME events covering more?

Dr See Toh :

With the multitudes of practice guidelines that have descended upon us, especially over the last two years, I wonder if we can have CME events planned specifically for the discussion of how these guidelines can be best adapted and adopted in a Family Practice.

Dr Sarani :

Paeds/OTG/TCM, complementary medicine, ethics of practice etc.

Dr Teo :

I have found skills courses the most beneficial. The ability to improve your technique and learn new techniques surpasses book learning. Unfortunately, the courses are sometimes over-subscribed and need to be booked way in advance, which is difficult for many of us as we don't know our roster 3-4 months in advance.

Dr Anbumalar :

More on chronic conditions such as diabetes, lipids, hypertension and CVS illnesses as there are always new developments in these areas. It is important for GP to keep pace with them.

College Mirror:

How do you think events can be further improved?

Dr See Toh :

In the future, perhaps we can have real-time online CME events for those doctors who are unable to make the physical attendance?

Dr Sarani :

A more spacious venue would be good.

Dr Teo :

Organise more skills courses. The ability to book on-line would be nice.

Dr Anbumalar :

Possibly a bigger venue.

College Mirror:

How do you find the GDFM program so far?

Dr See Toh :

Interesting, relevant and not particularly demanding on my time.

Dr Sarani :

Good. I would appreciate a hard copy of the notes.

Dr Teo :

Most of the modules are very interesting. As for the notes, I would prefer bound copies of each module when attending FMTTP lectures. Most of the members in my tutorial group also share this view.

Dr Anbumalar :

Very useful and relevant for all GPs and those planning to be GPs. It also provides an opportunity for fellow GPs to get together and learn from one another. Perhaps there could be less emphasis on examinations and more on the learning aspect.

College Mirror:

How does GDFM benefit you in your practice as a GP?

Dr See Toh :

I recognise the reality that today's Medicine is undergoing unprecedented rapid changes and the rising community's expectations for our professional services. The challenge, therefore, is to find time to keep abreast with current knowledge and practice standards. The solo GP can no longer practise like the proverbial frog in the well with a limited vision of the world. This program helps me to keep up with these new knowledge and technology at a relatively relaxed pace and at the same time, provide a powerful network of mentors, collaborators and friends.

Dr Teo :

As I am the youngest member in the tutorial group, I find tutorial sessions extremely beneficial as not only am I able

to learn from the excellent tutors (Dr Lee Kheng Hock and Dr Gerard Low), I am also able to learn from the other more experienced GPs in the group. Some of them have many years of experience in private GP practice and I have learnt a lot of non-medical information from them – like how to run clinics.

Dr Anbumalar :

The pace is fine and the small group tutorials are optimal for learning and asking questions. Relevant topics are also taught and discussed, which provide a good revision for the GPs and the GPs-to-be.

College Mirror:

Will you recommend the GDFM to other doctors to attend the program?

Dr See Toh :

Not meaning to sound like a paid commercial, I have no reservations recommending this program to fellow doctors. After all, efforts to maintain high standards of practice have to be continuous and lifelong, so why not choose a relatively undemanding and yet very relevant program like this to start the habit of CME!

Dr Sarani :

Yes!

Dr Teo :

I have already recommended the programme to a good friend who is already in his first year of GDFM training. I think that the ability to interact with all the experienced GPs and tutors is a golden opportunity unrivalled by other abilities of continued education.

Dr Anbumalar :

Definitely!