

Empowering the Primary Care Sector

By Agency for Integrated Care

One of the three dialogue sessions in full swing

These are exciting times for the primary care sector. New initiatives have been mooted by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to better empower GPs to deliver holistic, quality and continuing care for patients with chronic diseases. Family Medicine Clinics (FMCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs) and the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) are several proposed or enhanced initiatives to push Singapore's primary care sector towards greater heights of professionalism and patient-care excellence. These were announced at MOH's Primary Care Workplan Seminar held in October 2011.

Some initiatives have taken off successfully, such as the enhanced CHAS initiative. As of December 2012, there were already 240,000 CHAS beneficiaries, almost a sixfold increase as compared to the year before. Its success to date can be attributed in part to GPs' support and participation. To date, more than 540 GPs and 295 dental clinics are lending their support to CHAS, widening Singaporeans' reach to subsidised medical and dental care across the island. The continued importance of GPs' role in CHAS is emphasised more than ever today, a point which Minister for Health Gan Kim Yong mentioned at a recent GP Town Hall Session. He highlighted the need to tap on the private GP sector to address the high patient volume faced by the polyclinics, and CHAS was one way of directing subsidies to the public and GPs, to move patients in a more targeted and purposeful way.

Recognising the value of GPs' role and feedback in setting the direction and pace of transforming the primary care sector, the key priority of MOH and the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) has been to create avenues to engage GPs. From January to February this year, three GP Town Hall Sessions, hosted by Minister Gan, were held to update GPs on the initiatives announced under the MOH Primary Care Masterplan. In all, more than 120 GPs attended the three sessions, during which they gained a deeper understanding of the various primary care initiatives (FMCs and CHCs) from the relevant healthcare clusters. Ideas on how to collaborate with GPs were also sought during the sessions. This was followed by lively dialogues between the GPs in attendance and Prof K Satku, Director of Medical Services, MOH; Prof Tay Boon Keng, Group Director, Health Services Group, MOH; and members of the healthcare clusters' senior management. The three dialogue sessions were facilitated by Dr Theresa Yap, Dr Alvin Lum and Dr Tan Tze Lee respectively.

Many of the doctors present at the GP Town Hall Sessions gave good feedback on how the new primary care initiatives could be improved to better support their medical practice to provide quality care for their patients. They were supportive of the CHC initiative and would like more CHCs to be built, to which MOH shared that more are being planned. Some GPs expressed interest in participating in the FMCs and looked forward to actively engaging MOH and the healthcare clusters for this initiative.



Health Minister Gan (front row, fourth from left) with officials from MOH and the healthcare clusters

The GPs who attended the sessions also provided feedback on CHAS, such as enhancing the annual subsidy claim cap and age criteria to qualify for CHAS, to benefit even more Singaporeans, which MOH will review. MOH also took the opportunity to clarify that clinics participating in CHAS are able to refer CHAS patients to Specialist Outpatient Clinics as subsidised patients, which would serve to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for our local population.

The Primary Care Masterplan and the different initiatives being piloted to meet different care needs in the community are still evolving. For their success, constant feedback from GPs on their development and ways to synergise and collaborate on their roll-out will be important. Fruitful engagement with GPs through forums and town hall sessions, to name a few ways, are here to stay. If you are a GP, do join us when you receive invitations to these events in future, and share your insights, expertise, aspirations and concerns with us to help transform the primary care sector!

You may download the presentation slides and photos from the GP Town Hall Sessions at <http://www.primarycarepages.sg>. For more information, please email us at gp@aic.sg. SMA