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SMA NEWS



Professor Tan Chorh Chuan

Inception of New Family Medicine Programmes

The Director of Medical Services, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan was the Guest of Honour at the launch of the Family Medicine (FM) Academic Year on 23rd June 2001 at the Auditorium of the Institute of Health. The ceremony was organised by the College of Family Physicians Singapore to induct doctors commencing their post-graduate training for the Diploma, Masters and Fellowship this year, and to mark the inception of the Fellowship in Aged Care and the newly structured modular CME courses (see Glossary on pg. 13 and side box). Amongst the guests present was the Master of the Academy of Medicine Singapore, Professor Walter Tan, the CEO of Singhealth, Professor Tan Ser Kiat, senior officials of the Ministry of Health, the National University of Singapore, and the National Healthcare Group.

In his speech, the Director of Medical Services commended "the College and all its partners on their continued commitment towards excellence in Family Medicine (FM)" and expressed the Ministry's full support for the College's efforts. He also stressed the important role that Family Physicians (FP) play in the healthcare delivery system of Singapore and the need for further FM training. For doctors who are embarking on the College's Fellowship programme in Aged Care, he pledged the Ministry's professional recognition to the doctors who have decided to pursue a career

working in community hospitals. He also expressed the Ministry's hope that the college would set up similar Fellowship programmes in other aspects of community and domiciliary care.

THE ROLES OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Prof. Tan Chorh Chuan said that "GPs currently provide 80% of primary health care in this country; in addition to providing first-line acute and chronic care, General Practitioners (GPs) are key agents in the implementation of our national control programmes for major diseases. The success of these programmes depends greatly on the GPs' skill and dedication in carrying out health education, screening and primary prevention, as well as ensuring that chronic diseases are well controlled so as to prevent the onset of disabling complications.

With the rapid ageing of our population, family physicians also serve as valuable partners in complementing and supporting the community-based care of elderly patients and their families. This is illustrated by the Ministry's recently established Primary Care Partnership Scheme, in which GPs are subsidised for providing care to the needy elderly.

Apart from contributing to national efforts to combat chronic disease and to meet the needs of the growing elderly, GPs can also play a role in the management of patients who no longer require specialist care. GPs can provide appropriate follow-up care so that these patients can be cared for more effectively within

the community than in overcrowded hospital Specialist Outpatient Clinics.

NEED FOR FURTHER FM TRAINING
To be optimally effective in discharging all these roles, our GPs need to be well trained in Family Medicine. There was a time in the not-too-distant past when the scope of medical knowledge was still relatively modest in dimensions. It was possible then for a GP to render adequate care by the standards of the day for most of his patients based purely on his medical undergraduate training, supplemented perhaps by an occasional journal article or drug talk.

The GP of today, however, practises in a very different landscape. He needs

STRUCTURED MODULAR CME

The College launched the Modular CME Initiative for all GPs in collaboration with NHG and Singhealth on 23rd June 2001. The initiative calls for CME to be structured around the 8 modular themes of the Family Medicine Training Programme (FMTP) of the GDFM and Masters. The FMTP comprises of 8 quarterly distance learning modules with workshops conducted in the second month of each quarter.

Under this initiative, the first month of the quarter would be devoted to skill courses while the third month would be for updates on the module's theme. Private sector collaboration with the College would also be worked out so that doctors can now plan their CME learning systematically to encompass the panoply of medicine.



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to keep up with the latest advances in medical science and technology; he has to be able to meet the needs and expectations of his increasingly well-educated patients. He must also be prepared to work in a climate where doctors are increasingly called upon to demonstrate greater accountability for their clinical and ethical decisions.

The GP of today therefore has to realise that his professional education does not and cannot come to an end with graduation. Further training in Family Medicine is necessary as part of an overall strategy to continually improve the quality and standard of primary care physicians in Singapore. It is hoped that through such efforts, we will boost public and patient confidence in the acumen and ability of our GPs and also help to minimise the incidence of medical errors and medico-legal complaints.

FM TRAINING FOR BONDED MOS

The Ministry fully recognises the value of FM training and in this respect, we would like more of our medical officers (MOs) to obtain some form of FM training before they leave the public sector to become GPs. We realise that it is not possible for every MO who is not a specialist trainee to be given a Family Medicine traineeship to sit for the Master of Medicine examination.

However, the Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to encourage more public sector MOs to take up the Graduate Diploma course in Family Medicine (GDFM) while they are serving out their bonds. We have begun working with the

College to gradually expand the training capacity of the course so that more MOs will be able to participate. At the same time, the College plans to modularise training and to employ more distance learning techniques (such as web-based teaching resources) to make it as convenient as possible for MOs to follow the course at their own time in between their clinical duties.

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION FOR COMMUNITY HOSPITALS' DOCTORS
I am pleased to note the College is launching this year a new Family Medicine Fellowship Programme in Aged Care that will lead to the title of FCFPS (Fellow of the College of Family Physicians Singapore). The Ministry welcomes this programme, as it will provide professional recognition to the doctors who have decided to pursue a career working in community hospitals. We hope that in future the College may consider setting up similar Fellowship programmes in other aspects of community and domiciliary care (such as palliative or terminal care).

CONCLUSION

"Life-long learning" is a catch phrase that has been bandied around quite a bit of late. Nonetheless it describes quite accurately the challenge and professional responsibility for all doctors to stay current with latest developments through CME and to continually strive for higher standards of practice through courses like these provided by the College of Family Physicians.

I would like to congratulate and commend you all on having risen to this

challenge by committing yourselves, your time and your energies to these various courses in Family Medicine. I assure you that your efforts will be rewarded and that you will be leading the way for many others in the profession to follow." ■

GLOSSARY

Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM) is a 2-year CFPS part-time programme for any registered medical practitioner. It consists of 8 quarterly modules conducted by workshops and distance learning (FMTP), small-group tutorials as well as skills course leading to the diplomate examination conducted by the Graduate School of Medical Studies (GSMS) of NUS.

Masters of Medicine in Family Medicine (M Med FM). 2 programmes lead to a common examination conducted by the GSMS, the 3-year MOH traineeship scheme for FM trainees in service and a 2-year Private Practitioner Stream (PPS) for doctors who have at least 4 years primary care experience. Besides the FMTP, there are regular small group tutorials, case dissertations, practice survey and clinical courses.

Fellowship of the College of Family Physicians Singapore (FCFPS) is a 2-year programme that trains selected doctors with M Med FM for leadership in clinical and academic areas to practise as consultant physicians in Family Medicine. The Aged Care programme launched recently is the first 'conjoint' fellowship programme to specially trained FPs in specific disciplines. For more information on any of the above programmes, call CFPS at Tel: 223 1264 or E-mail: rccfps@pacific.net.sg