

Knowledge Gained from "Fieldnotes"

Review by Dr Tina Tan, Editor

For a period of time between the late 2016 and the first half of 2017, I diligently perused the *Straits Times* to see when A/Prof Chong Siow Ann's next column would be published. The more discerning readers (ie, fellow former trainees) will recognise the reason. It was common knowledge among psychiatry exit examination candidates that A/Prof Chong's articles were a good source for questions and discussions raised during tutorials and examination practices.

That being said, I've now developed a habit of reading A/Prof Chong's writings in the newspapers because I've discovered that he has a lot to say, with a lot of substance to share. He is esteemed in our hospital because of the amount of research he has done, which has contributed greatly to our knowledge of mental illness in Singapore.

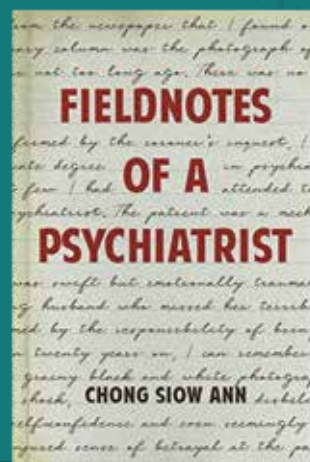
This book is a delightful bundle containing the author's contributions to the *Straits Times* over the past few years. It starts with the most dramatic of article titles, "The Day I Wanted my Father to Die", which, when you look closely, is actually a commentary about end-of-life care showing a softer side of A/Prof Chong that I didn't know about. Plus, the title was most attention-grabbing, which was the newspaper's intention after all.

At times, the book can make for heavy, almost depressing, reading,

especially the first section on dying and death, and the sections on ethical issues that doctors and psychiatrists face. There are current-day commentaries too, such as parenting, the pursuit of happiness, as well as an article about then-US Presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Wikipedia defines "fieldnotes" as "qualitative notes recorded by researchers in the course of field research... intended to be read as evidence that gives *meaning* and aids in the *understanding* of the phenomenon." That is precisely what this book is about. It isn't meant to be a textbook on various medico-legal issues and mental illnesses, but rather a collection of the author's attempts to summarise observations that he has made over the course of his career as a doctor and researcher, and to make these observations understandable to the broader public.

I would recommend this book to current and future psychiatry exit examination candidates (but you already know that). More importantly, I would recommend this book to anyone, especially non-doctors and non-psychiatrists, who desires a better understanding of mental illness and the various complex medico-legal issues that health professionals face, but happen not to have a subscription to the *Straits Times*. ♦



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Dr Tan is a consultant at the Institute of Mental Health and has a special interest in geriatric psychiatry. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

