

Stepping Up COMMUNITY Healthcare

By Agency for Integrated Care

There is an increasing need to integrate primary and community healthcare as our population ages. Recognising the importance of General Practitioners (GPs) as key partners in provision of medical services and primary touchpoints for access to community healthcare, the Community Care Manpower Development Award (CCMDA) aims to help widen GPs' scope of practice and ramp up the manpower capabilities of the community care sector.

Under the CCMDA, administered by Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), MOH and the Community Care organisations co-fund GPs to pursue any of these four postgraduate programmes - Family Medicine, Palliative Medicine, Geriatric Medicine and Mental Health. GPs then partner the sponsoring Community Care organisations to extend their scope of care into the areas of home care, centre-based and/or residential care.

To date, 25 GPs have been sponsored under this award since its launch in 2015, with MOH announcing commitment to invest approximately \$12 million across the next four years in the community care sector's workforce development through the CCMDA.

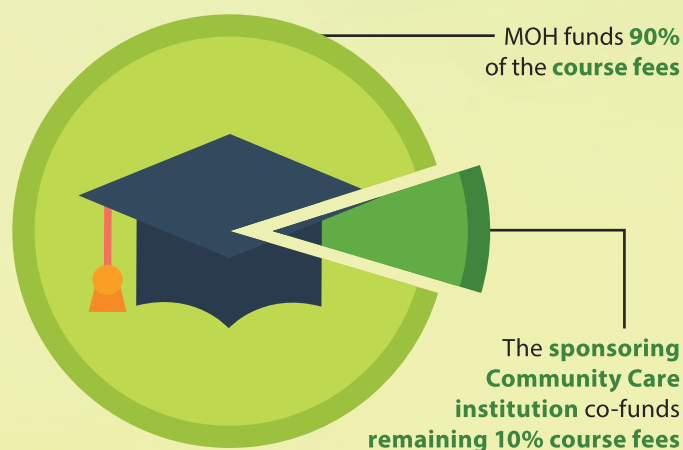
These four postgraduate programmes, available on part-time basis, are organized by the Division of Graduate Medical Studies (DGMS), NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in collaboration with professional bodies/institutions. The structured training

aims to further develop GPs' confidence and acuity in management of conditions in these related disciplines.

The course choices available are:

- 1. Graduate Diploma in Palliative Medicine (GDPM)**
This course aims to train healthcare professionals in modules from symptom management to ethical and legal issues with regards to palliative care.
Enrolment date: February 2018
- 2. Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine (GDFM)**
This course serves to train doctors in the primary care sector for family care, which caters to the diverse needs of patients from children to the aged.
Enrolment date: March 2018
- 3. Graduate Diploma in Mental Health (GDMH)**
In this course, GPs will be trained to diagnose and treat minor mental health issues in the community setting such as anxiety and addictions.
Enrolment date: March 2018
- 4. Graduate Diploma in Geriatric Medicine (GDGM)**
This course, a collaboration with the Society of Geriatrics Medicine Singapore (SGMS), is aimed to equip GPs with the basic knowledge and skills to care for the elderly.
Enrolment date: June 2018

Community Care Manpower Development Award (CCMDA)



Institutions which have sponsored GPs for the CCMDA are:

- All Saints Home
- Dover Park Hospice
- Home Nursing Foundation
- Methodist Welfare Services
- Metta Welfare Association
- Orange Valley Nursing Homes Pte Ltd
- Ren Ci Hospital
- Singapore Cancer Society
- Singapore Christian Home
- St. Andrew's Community Hospital
- Thye Hwa Kwan Moral Charities Limited
- TOUCH Community Services Ltd



“Studying Palliative Medicine under the CCMDA has given me more confidence to approach end-of-life care, especially for my terminally-ill patients in the nursing home that I make rounds at twice a month.”

- Dr. Jonathan Yeo, Family Physician of Family Medicine Clinic Chinatown,
Recipient of the 2016 Community Care Manpower Development Award

What inspired you to pursue GDPM?

My practice comprises largely of elderly patients both at the Family Medicine Clinic and at the nursing home where end-of-life care will become increasingly important. Family physicians should be equipped sufficiently to deal with this topic.

Medical school and postgraduate training in Family Medicine equipped us to be doctors to treat diseases, but taught little in coping with the uncertainty of life – death and dying.

My last exposure as a medical officer in a palliative unit was nine years ago. I have not dealt with end-of-life care since then so my knowledge and skills in this area were rusty.

What prompted you to apply for CCMDA?

It was a win-win situation to be sponsored while equipping myself with the necessary palliative care knowledge and skills.

What are some challenges you face in helping patients with life-limiting illnesses?

Terminally-ill patients (and their families) are usually reluctant to discuss the topic of death and dying with their primary care physicians. It is also "taboo" in the Asian culture to engage in the discussion of these topics before the patient has deteriorated significantly.

In fact, palliative care should start when life-limiting illnesses are diagnosed, with the patient setting clear goals early – part of the disease-specific Advance Care Plan.

It is also difficult to devote significant amount of time to care for terminally-ill, home-bound patients towards the end of their illness trajectory, while juggling a clinical practice. To provide effective palliative care is hence a team effort, and we have to be part of a bigger network of trained doctors and nurses.

Resource-wise, access to many controlled drugs used in palliative care requires logistical commitment of maintaining a detailed drug register and ensuring these drugs are kept locked securely when not in use – something that a primary care physician may not be willing to invest effort in.

How has studying Palliative Medicine helped you to face such challenges?

It has given me more confidence to approach end-of-life care, especially for my terminally-ill patients in the nursing home that I make rounds at twice a month.

However, knowledge is but just a stepping stone. Despite it, sufficient opportunities to continuously practise what has been learnt must be present in our job scope. Also, cultural mindsets of our patient population need to evolve before we can better deliver such care in the community.

Time and resource are major challenges that the knowledge obtained through studying cannot overcome.

In what way can GPs contribute to the development of community care services to allow ageing in place in Singapore?

More GPs should be encouraged to take up postgraduate training in geriatric and palliative care to offer their services in managing complex conditions in elderly patients, and dealing with end-of-life issues in the community.

Is CCMDA for you?

- Are you interested in developing your practice in areas of Family Medicine, Mental Health, Palliative Medicine and/or Geriatric Medicine?
- Are you already enrolled or have plans to enrol in one of the four eligible courses?

What you get from this award?

- Successful applicants will receive up to 100% funding for their choice of course
- Upon course completion, recipients of this award will form a 1-year partnership (minimum of 156 hours) with the sponsoring Community Care organisation
- Remuneration (\$80 - \$100/hour) for the time committed to the Community Care organisation

**Application for CCMDA is now open.
To apply or learn more about it, visit
www.primarycarepages.sg today,
or contact AIC at gp@aic.sg or 6632 1199.**