

# Ageing:

## THE INEVITABLE PROCESS



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*Tina Tan*  
Deputy Editor

Anyone watched *Logan*? This was Hugh Jackman's final Wolverine movie and it resonated with me because of one of its themes – ageing.

[Spoiler alert] In brief, Wolverine and Professor X are getting along in years and dealing with the inevitable effects of ageing. Wolverine no longer heals instantaneously and his flawless adamantium claws do not work properly. And in an ironic twist of fate, Professor X has some form of dementia; his telepathic powers have gone haywire and this frail old man has to be cared for by Wolverine (yet another irony).

The moral of the story: even famous Marvel mutants are not immune to the ravages of time, and they struggle too (at least, Wolverine does) with the perennial problem of how to provide appropriate elderly care. It became quickly apparent that Wolverine isn't the most capable of caregivers. I cringed when I saw Professor X's state at the start of the movie, instantly comparing Wolverine (a rather poor carer) to the wonderful nurses I've worked with in the Institute of Mental Health's dementia-friendly wards.

The Silver Tsunami is upon us. The Government has put in place measures to help cope with the rising healthcare needs of our elderly and to keep as many of them in the community as possible – in line with their goal of active ageing and ageing in place.

But to understand the future, it helps to have a glimpse of the past (still in *X-Men* mode here). A/Prof Pang Weng Sun provides a brief overview of the development of geriatric medicine in Singapore, highlighting the extensive

changes that the Ministry of Health implemented to deal with our growing elderly population, from as early as the 1980s.

And speaking of the past, I recently watched a few episodes of Channel NewsAsia's social experiment and documentary, *Turn Back the Clock*. It was an interesting take on reminiscence therapy, which is sometimes used in dementia care. A group of elderly was placed in a rented colonial bungalow for a week and lived as if it were the 1970s, taking care of one another without external help. I'm pleased that Dr Carol Tan, who was the geriatrician for the production, has contributed her insights into what is needed to help our elders age well amid Singapore's changing healthcare landscape.

Family physicians play a crucial role in the care of our elders, especially as they approach their last days. Dr Rina Nga shares her view on the need for GPs to play a more active role in palliative care and the challenges to overcome.

We've also included a heartfelt article by Dr Joseph Leong, who shares about caring for his father with dementia. In reading his experience, one can see the heavy influence of Christianity in shaping his perspective as a caregiver.

This issue also features the next instalment of A/Prof Cuthbert Teo's series on the history of medicine in Singapore – a riveting account of what it was like to practise during the Japanese Occupation. If we want to remind ourselves of why we need to look after our elders, and look after them *well*, let A/Prof Teo's article be the beginning of

the reminder – they are our founders whose work has laid the foundations of what we have today. We learn from their accomplishments as well as their mistakes. I was especially reminded of this in the past year when I had the chance to meet Drs Lee Suan Yew and Jerry Lim on several occasions. I am grateful for the stories and valuable lessons they have shared with me.

I hope that this issue will provide new and interesting insights into the care of our elders.

Oh, and go watch *Logan* if you haven't; just to see how *not* to do it. And no, Marvel didn't pay me to promote their new film. I'm just an *X-Men* fan.

Who's up for *Star Wars* later this year? ♦