

Joining Hands

TO FIGHT CHRONIC DISEASES

Text by Dr Tan Yia Swam

Primary care forms the foundation of our nation's health. In retrospect, heavy emphasis had been placed on specialty teaching and hospital attachments during my medical school journey, and I spent only a few weeks on attachment to a polyclinic and a GP. That was the only short stint in primary care I had before training in general surgery. Now that I'm older, and juggling the familial duties of a mother and a daughter, I think I better appreciate the importance of good primary care physicians who see patients as a whole, rather than as

various specialised problem lists! In this issue, Dr Chie Zhi Ying has gathered a good range of articles to showcase the breadth of primary care and some recent developments. These are just some of the many good works that our GPs and polyclinic doctors do. There are also many areas that need continual improvements, and I know that there are some dedicated doctors who are heavily involved. SMA strives to actively partner with our members; do send in feedback and volunteer your time to help effect new changes.

Text by Dr Chie Zhi Ying

With the recent restructuring of our healthcare system into three integrated clusters, more polyclinics are being built to provide primary care services. Our ageing population, increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, and rising demand for quality and affordable healthcare services indicate that we have to innovate and find solutions to tackle these challenges effectively.

Having worked in polyclinics for the past few years, I do enjoy the hectic work life in outpatient services. Patients from all walks of life, and who range from babies to working adults and to the elderly, come through the consult door with different complaints. You learn new things every day and each day is never the same.

Hence, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this issue's focus on chronic disease management. First, we are privileged to have A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah, chief executive officer of National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), share with us the indispensable role that polyclinics play in providing affordable health services and the transformation journey they have embarked on in meeting the rising healthcare needs of our ageing population.

Besides public healthcare institutions, our private GPs play an equally important role in taking care of our community. The introduction of the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) allows eligible Singaporeans to enjoy subsidised healthcare services via participating GPs. Aside from that, the CHAS decantment scheme, which oversees the transfer of CHAS patients from polyclinics to private family medicine clinics, is also a good example of how the public and private sectors can form partnerships to share the load of chronic disease patients and to reduce waiting times at polyclinics. There are currently several clinics participating in this scheme and we have invited Dr Sharon Ngoh, a family physician at Ang Mo Kio Family Medicine Clinic, and Ms Terry Kam, CHAS coordinator from Parkway Shenton Group, to pen their thoughts on the benefits and challenges of the scheme.

As doctors, we are always trying to motivate our patients to lead healthy lifestyles, starting with the right diet. As the saying goes, "you are what you eat". Many chronic diseases can be prevented just by watching our diet a little more



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Guest Editor

closely. Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, debunks some local diet myths and provides us with healthy eating tips.

Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish philosopher and historian, once said: "He who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything." His words underscore just how essential and fundamental good health is to mankind. Let's be prepared for the challenges to come and strive to achieve a quality and affordable healthcare system. With that said, I hope you enjoy this issue's read! ◆