

A Heart For Service

Interview with
Dr Jeanette Chen



Dr Jeanette Chen obtained her BMedSci(Hons) and MBBCh degrees from the University of Wales College of Medicine in 1993 and 1994, respectively.

She continued her postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology (O&G) in Cardiff, Bristol and Birmingham, and obtained her MRCOG in 1999. Dr Chen returned to Singapore in 2000 and worked as a consultant in General Obstetrics and Gynaecology at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). During her time in KKH, she was awarded numerous Service from the Heart Awards and also received the Excellent Service (EXSA) STAR Award launched by SPRING Singapore (2008). She was also very active in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate medical students and obtained the Dean's award in teaching. In 2009, she left KKH and started her own O&G practice in Thomson Medical Centre. She has been serving as an elected member on Singapore Medical Council (SMC) since 2014.



inadvertently become harder for male doctors?

Being a female obstetrician does have its advantages. We can understand what women go through as we have likely also journeyed through similar issues. In addition, most women are more comfortable seeing an obstetrician of the same gender. However, I also know of many male doctors who are very popular obstetricians. At the end of the day, I believe it is not the gender that is important, but a combination of experience, communicative skills, emotional intelligence and bedside manners that truly matters.

What advice would you give to a young female medical student/trainee who is considering a specialisation in your field?

O&G as a specialty requires lots of passion and nerves of steel. Decisions have to be made in split seconds and the implications of those decisions have important consequences. With the current medico-legal climate and medical indemnity issues, one should enter the specialty knowing what she or he is in for. I have never regretted specialising in O&G. I have delivered many babies in the past and I still feel much joy bringing a new life into the world each time. Helping women sort out their medical problems or even lending a listening ear has also been very meaningful.

What inspired you to serve on the SMC?

I decided to stand for the SMC elections three years ago because I felt the call to serve my profession and not just be an observer. Being in the SMC puts one in the public eye and fellow doctors have high expectations of us due to the heavy responsibility bestowed on us. As such, I aspire to be true to myself and fair in my decisions. Being in the

Why did you decide to become an obstetrician-gynaecologist (OB-GYN) and how was it that you came to enter private practice?

My undergraduate years were spent at the University of Wales College of Medicine. It was great because we were sent all around Wales for our clinical attachments!

My interest in O&G came about after one such clinical posting as a medical student. I was posted to a district hospital in North Wales and was one of only two students there. The maternity unit was a very busy one and as it had mainly low-risk patients, I was able to deliver 15 babies during my stint there!

Being the only female out of the two students gave me an advantage as it was easier to obtain permission from the parents to deliver their babies.

I enjoyed this speciality immensely as it dealt with women, their health issues and babies, as well as the challenges that came with this speciality, and hence decided to become an OB-GYN.

After being in the UK for 12 years, I returned to Singapore in 2000 and began working at KKH. However, I later

decided to set up my own private practice at Thomson Medical Centre so that I could enjoy a more balanced work and family life. By then, I was a mother to two young children, with a rather busy husband. My decision to venture into private practice offered me the benefit of flexibility and the autonomy to be both a good mother and doctor.

How do you juggle the duties of being both a specialist and a mother of two?

Balancing work and family is never easy. One needs to be able to multitask and have a lot of family support. Being an OB-GYN means that one can be called to a delivery at any time. Living with my parents gives me the assurance that no matter what time I was called up, I could go with a peace of mind, knowing that my children will be well looked after. This synergistic arrangement had enabled me to focus on my career, while at the same time given me the ability to be there for the kids.

Do you think things have improved for female doctors in your field? Has it

SMC has enabled me to look at things from a broader perspective and not just from one narrow angle. I hope that in the future, more doctors will be willing to serve as well and hence bring forth more diversity in ideas and opinions for the betterment of our medical profession.

What do you hope for the profession to achieve in the next five years?

I hope that in the future, all my fellow doctors will also find meaningful and constructive ways to contribute to our profession. This includes stepping up and taking up positions of influence and making the difference that will benefit our medical profession.

Recently, there have been a few disciplinary cases that have stirred emotions in our profession. Many have voiced their opinions. This would be an opportune time to step up and make a difference by contributing one's time to serve the Council in various capacities. The Council is formed to regulate and maintain the high standards

expected of this noble profession. Views and opinions may differ but ultimately, to enforce what is right and fair, we need competent and fair people to step up to serve.

As a woman, I have never felt discriminated or disadvantaged as a result of my gender. At the end of the day, it is your attitude and what you want to strive for in life that is important.

I grew up in a family with two brothers. My dad had always advised me that I can do anything as long as I have my heart in the right place and be compassionate in whatever I do. Being a doctor himself, he was very supportive in all my decisions. I grew up well and never squirmed away from difficult decisions or situations. I hope that this attitude will also rub off on my two girls. I always tell them to reach for the skies, as there is no limit to what they can achieve!

How do you maintain a normal family life for the kids when your husband is a public figure?

Being married to a public figure has not really changed our lives.

We choose how we live our lives. The person I knew when I was 17 years old, the man I married and built a family with, has not changed much either. One thing we have in common is our faith in God, our sense of service and the heart to serve our community. We hope that we also set good examples to our kids and that they will grow up feeling loved, and with kind and humble hearts. ♦



Legend

- 1. Regular catch up over lunch with fellow O&G colleagues
- 2. With the hardworking labour ward staff in Thomson Medical Centre
- 3. Blessed with a loving family



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