



LIFE'S FINAL LAP

August saw the successful conclusion of the inaugural Singapore Medical Week organised by SMA, which was held at the Marina Bay Sands. The three-day conference saw various stakeholders of the healthcare industry coming together to discuss hotly debated health topics and future health trends, as well as provided a unique platform for healthcare experts to share the latest innovations and developments in healthcare. With our healthcare industry moving towards providing patient-centred care, I find it apt to introduce our October issue of *SMA News* on palliative care.

What comes to your mind when one talks about palliative care? To me, it is about patients and their loved ones coming together with their medical team to talk about a topic that is often considered taboo – death. Dealing with death can be a nerve-wrecking and agonising experience, and that's where palliative care comes into the picture – to meet all the needs of the patient as an individual while alleviating suffering and maximising their quality of life. In essence, it is about adding life to days and not days to life.

I had a patient, a middle-aged gentleman, who was diagnosed with metastatic gastric cancer a few months ago. The diagnosis was like a bolt of lightning out of the clear blue sky. Knowing that his days were numbered, he put a stop to his hectic work life (he was a self-confessed workaholic) at once and spent his time with loved ones instead, pursuing activities he had always wanted to do. In his words, he was reliving his life all over again and had never felt so carefree before. He passed on peacefully one month later. Since death knows no time and age, his story is now a constant reminder for me to not get caught up in the never-ending rat race of modern life.

As you browse through this issue, you'll find doctors sharing their thoughts on palliative care. We are privileged to have A/Prof Goh Lee Gan's insightful interview with Prof Anne Merriman, founder of Hospice Africa Uganda, on her dedication in bringing affordable palliative care to Africa and beyond. Dr Yang Sze Yee, palliative physician from Tan Tock Seng Hospital, gives us some tips on counselling terminally ill patients.



Dr Chie Zhi Ying is a family physician working in the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics. She enjoys freelance writing and singing. She writes for *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Shin Min Daily News* and *Health No.1*. She can be contacted at chiezhiying@gmail.com.

Chie Zhi Ying
Guest Editor

We also invited Dr Kenichi Sato, a family physician who has relocated from Japan to Singapore, to share his experience caring for patients in Japan and with palliative care.

Renowned American professional golfer Walter Hagen once said: "You're only here for a short visit. Don't hurry, don't worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way." With this, enjoy the read. ♦

Welcome on Board!

Hello to all readers! I would like to thank the Editor for inviting me to join the *SMA News* Editorial Board. It has been an honour and a privilege to contribute to this newsletter and I hope to be able to continue in the years to come.

Working with written media seems to have been firmly tied to each phase of my life, whether I was scribbling for *ACS Press* in secondary

school, editing the school's newsletter in junior college or doing layout for a varsity magazine – where I eventually met my wife. Writing remains for me a unique form of expression; the written word has a quiet dignity that defies all the pomp and glamour of modern media.

Through writing I hope to be able to continue to explore social issues



afflicting both doctors and patients. I firmly believe that the rights of patients and doctors are inextricably tied together and explaining this relationship clearly will help build trust in the medical community.

I look forward to many exciting and meaningful exchanges in the articles to come! ♦