

# Rediscovering the Joys and Pain

Text and photos by Dr Clive Tan, Editorial Board member



I recall I was due to travel to Orlando, Florida to speak at the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) Conference in March 2020. The conference was scheduled to start on 9 March 2020, and my flight was to be on the night of 7 March. At 2 am on 6 March, I received an email from HIMSS stating that the conference and exhibition had been cancelled – just four days before it was due to start. More than 40,000 speakers, exhibitors, attendees and staff were scheduled to be in Orlando for the event, and it was the first time the annual event had been cancelled in its 58 years of history.

Long story short – I got my refund back, but the online shopping from Carter's that I pre-planned for my kids was uncollected, and hopefully someone in the Days Inn by Wyndham Orlando found it to be a helpful gift as the pandemic unfolded. It was fortuitous in hindsight as I was soon plunged into the COVID-19 war in Singapore, first at the Singapore Armed Forces Medical Headquarters, then subsequently as the Head Medical Intelligence at the Joint Task Force (Assurance).

## Fast forward two years

Two years of the global pandemic introduced us to the world of online and virtual conferences, and we have gotten so used to it. Bouncing back to in-person meetings and conferences was strangely a “reverse culture shock”

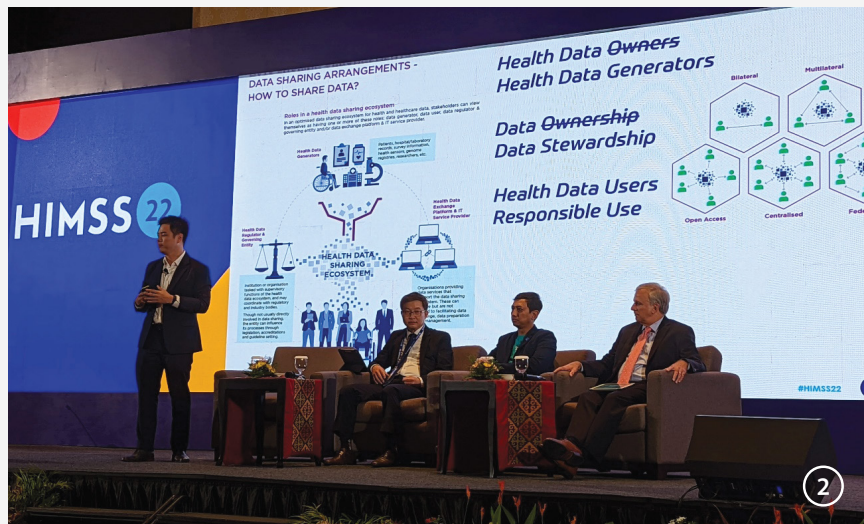
experience for many of us. Crossing the Johor-Singapore Causeway again in April this year seemed surreal and getting onto a flight to Denmark in May was trepidatious. A two-week course in Boston and Atlanta this June reintroduced me to the joys of living without a face mask – both indoors and outdoors. I was glad when Singapore finally made mask-wearing optional in August 2022.

I was especially delighted to be invited to speak at the HIMSS22 Asia Pacific Health Conference & Exhibition! After hearing that it was going to be held in Bali, I looked forward to seeing how the island was recovering from the pandemic. Bali is heavily dependent on tourism for its economy and was badly hit by the COVID-19 travel restrictions. With travel re-opening in 2022, Bali

has been aggressive in opening up its borders and marketing itself for leisure and business travel. I am not very good at mixing pleasure with my work travels, but hey, there's not a better place to start than Bali.

I felt more relaxed after I completed my speaking engagement, which was a morning plenary on the second day of the conference. That evening, I was ready for some authentic Balinese cuisine, and we went to Bumbu Bali Restaurant & Cooking School near Nusa Dua (not affiliated with the Bumbu Restaurant in Singapore), known best for their satays! They had an open kitchen and alfresco seating. The six of us – Sean, Raymond, Alvin, Whei Chern, Yih Yng and myself, colleagues from National Healthcare Group and friends from Ministry of Health – were seated at a long table





Bali as a conference destination was great! The conference halls were spacious, the food choices were excellent. Those with some additional time on their hands can reconnect with nature through Bali's beautiful beaches and cool mountain tops! Some friends went for a morning hike to catch a glimpse of sunrise from the mountain top; a few went rock-climbing, and many walked along the beachfront in the cool Balinese weather.



was quite deserted – a likely sign that the tourism industry in Bali was still taking time to recover. It was quite another picture at the airport though: the immigration was crowded and outbound flights were filled to the brim. I guess the airports may be what makes it less enjoyable for some, but I honestly did not mind it as I took the time and opportunity to reconnect with friends who were on the same flight.

with a view of the kitchen, where we could see the chef grilling the satays over an open flame. The satays came in a wide variety, and the beauty of dining in a group of six meant that we could try almost everything on the menu! If I had to choose a favourite, it would be the beef satay. Young coconuts were also a “must order” – they were really fresh and much larger than the Thai and Malaysian varieties that we usually get in Singapore.

### Home sweet home

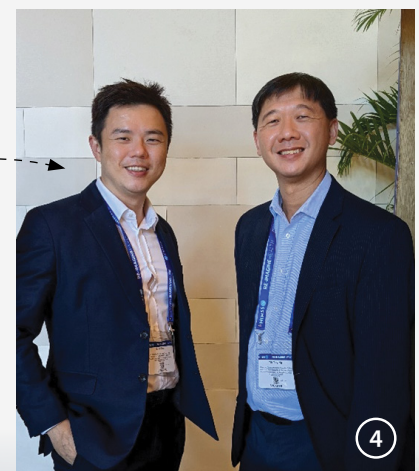
I was due to fly back to Singapore the day after the conference. Without much more time for sightseeing, I made the best of my morning by taking a leisurely stroll along the Nusa Dua beach, which

With the rest of the world opening up, including perennial favourites such as Japan, it is unlikely that I will be in Bali anytime soon. I am grateful for the invite by HIMSS to be at Bali for the conference, and I hope for the Balinese people that their tourism and economy will do well in the upcoming years. ♦

### Legend

1. With Shawn, Raymond, Alvin, Whei Chern and Yih Yng at the satay dinner
2. Speaking and moderating a plenary on Data Sharing, with experts from South Korea's Health Insurance and Review Agency, Indonesia's Ministry of Health and HIMSS' Vice President
3. Bali's international airport was crowded with throngs of tourists and business travellers! Outbound flights were filled to the brim
4. Dr Tan and Dr Ng Yih Yng, who was invited to speak on Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Hospital without Walls Initiative
5. The quiet beachfront at Nusa Dua. Or maybe it was too early – this photo was taken around 7 am

Dr Tan is a public health specialist based in the National Healthcare Group, currently working on integrated care, digital health and population health. He is looking forward to travelling with his wife and three kids in December; their first overseas travel as a family since December 2019.



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