

FOR THIS year's Doctors in Training issue, I had the honour of interviewing Permanent Secretary (Health) Mrs Tan Ching Yee for her insights and perspective into healthcare, with special emphasis placed on young doctors. She also shared her opinion on how to balance career and family, as well as the number one thing she values in a medical practitioner – competency. We can only showcase some highlights of our conversation within our limited pages (see facing page), so do check out <http://goo.gl/TqZnQR> for the full transcript.

Competency is hard to evaluate sometimes. We have been using official proficiency tests, examinations, and outcome and morbidity measures to produce entire cohorts of “competent” doctors on paper. Yet, do good assessment scores translate to real-life competency? I have seen some top scholars becoming dismal doctors; while some “failures”, such as repeat students, turn into outstanding clinicians. In actuality, there are so many variables at play: book knowledge, familiarity with on-site equipment and available resources, and the ability to work in a team and also think on their feet. In addition, patients want doctors to truly care for them, not just treat them like case studies, and communicate well. However, collegiality should not be allowed to mask or make up for a lack of competency.

I understand that the residency system aims to provide competency in a shorter period of time through better structure, as compared to the basic specialty training/advanced specialty training programme. I am very impressed by most of the residents whom I have worked with in Tan Tock Seng Hospital and National University Hospital – they are brilliant, clever, hardworking and humble. However, there are some trainee doctors who do not share those valuable traits. Some others have dropped out along the way for various reasons. A few are my personal friends, and I wish them all the best in their alternative careers (you know who you are!).

Seven residents from different institutions and disciplines write about their experiences and learning journeys thus far (pages 28 to 35). It is heartening to see the passion and love these young doctors have for their chosen specialties – truly inspirations to us all! Student leaders from the three local medical schools pen their thoughts and reflections on medical education (pages 25 to 27). I believe that by being inclusive of students, SMA can help smoothen their transition to fully fledged physicians. I recently met some M1 students from various Specialist Interest Groups for short term job shadowing attachments. Their questions for me have inspired an imaginary cheeky article on how to choose a residency programme from various viewpoints (page 36). I hope students and doctors in training don't take this article seriously!

A/Prof Arpana Vidyarthi and the first cohort of the Singapore Chief Residency Programme (SCRCP) give us an overview of this new initiative, which intends to nurture and train junior physicians to become future healthcare leaders (page 19). SCRCP also provides a direct link between young doctors in training and senior doctors in management. As Mrs Tan Ching Yee mentioned in her interview, we had a transition in Director of Medical Services, which means that new perspectives are being brought into the healthcare leadership. SMA News looks forward to contributing in whatever way we can to help bring healthcare forward.

In time to come, this publication will be launching a series of “Focus” articles on various specialties, which will provide updates to senior doctors, as well as insider tips that may help guide junior doctors and medical students in their residency choices. We will need your continued utmost support, and more feedback on what you want to see in the future. Email us at news@sma.org.sg!

Meanwhile, I hope you'll enjoy this edition of SMA News, and keep an eye out for upcoming issues later this year (sneak previews: Itch and Wheeze, and a Long Ride for the Pink Ribbon). No prizes for guessing the themes! ■



By Dr Tan Yia Swam,
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