



New Beginnings

By Dr Tan Yia Swam, Editor

HAPPY NEW YEAR to our readers! The past few months as Editor have been busy and exhilarating. There were several changes in the Editorial Board – three of the long-time members, Dr Toh Han Chong, A/Prof Daniel Fung and A/Prof Cuthbert Teo, have been promoted to advisors. There's been an infusion of new blood: Dr Leong Choon Kit, Dr Tina Tan and Dr Jonathan Tan (us three Tans are not related, it is purely coincidental!). On top of that, Dr Tina Tan has kindly agreed to take on the job of being my Deputy Editor. We also bade farewell to Dr Jeremy Lim, who wanted to step down to focus on his work and family.

Being (still) young and (moderately) radical, I have been giving the *SMA News* team many new challenges and they have worked very hard to bring my ideas to life. Here I wish to register my thanks for Mrs Sarah Lim, Ms Denise Yuen, Ms Mellissa Ang and Ms Jane Lim. I welcome Ms Sylvia Thay onboard, as Ms Ang has transferred to the Membership department.

I hope that readers have noted changes in *SMA News*. We have expended effort in making sure that each issue is centred around a theme, so that both writers and readers have a focused interest. There is now a greater involvement of "young" doctors and students, simply because I know more of them personally. The Life in Pixels photo competition, launched early last year, was well received, and we recently secured a partnership with Canon – more details to follow. My deepest appreciation go to all those who have provided feedback, both positive and negative. I have taken them all to heart, and will work with the team for further improvements. I hope that we can obtain even more comments – what would you like to read more about? What's good, or bad? Keep the newsletter online or retain it as a hard copy? (Someone told me it's for easy reading in the loo. We were devastated.)

In this issue, we have a piece on vaccination for healthcare workers by Dr Lam Mun San – the first in a series on workplace safety and health, an idea spearheaded by Dr Wong Sin Yew. Our young colleagues share articles on their overseas experiences – volunteering for Project Sa'Bai in Cambodia, attending TEDMED and dermatology conferences in America. We also showcase our creative talents with a poem by Dr Chie Zhi Ying. Meanwhile, Dr Wong Tien Hua reviews a new book by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan and Dr Ong Chooi Peng, Counseling Within the Consultation, which will be officially launched at the end of this month.

Going forward, this is my vision for *SMA News*: I will continue to engage "young" doctors, and retain ties with current doctors. (I refuse to say "old" as each year brings me further out of the "young" group!) In addition, there will be a greater representation of primary care physicians. One great surgeon-mentor introduced the "Hour of Inspiration" at my previous workplace: every half-yearly or so, the usual journal club presentation is replaced by 60 minutes of entertainment. We lovingly call it "Ah Hoi" and devote our utmost energy to putting up a good item. Every year, we are praised for our bravery. ("*Wah*, you dare to sing on stage like that *ah*?") The Chinese phrase 勇气可嘉 ("*yong qi ke jia*", meaning "commendable courage") comes to mind. But we have also seen many brilliant performances by fellow colleagues. I know that many doctors are multitalented, and I hope to showcase that in our very own newsletter – be it visual art, photography, creative writing, music reviews, and so on.

A recurring problem every Editor has faced is doctors not daring to write. Often, many prefer to seek clearance from their organisation's corp comms department before contributing. I would like to encourage would-be writers that this is the best forum to publish in, where a board of doctors reviews your work and ensures its appropriateness for public viewing. Much safer than Facebook rants! (You know who you are!) Remember – *SMA News* is "for doctors, by doctors". As I promised before, it will not be hijacked by any one individual or organisation. The newsletter is for all SMA members, and we will do our best to balance free speech with fair representation.

Most importantly, I thank you readers. Without you, none of this would have meaning. The editorial team wishes everyone a good year ahead − keep on reading *SMA News*, even if it is in the restroom. ■



Dr Tan Yia Swam is now an associate consultant at the Breast Unit of KK Women's and Children's Hospital. She continues to juggle the commitments of being a doctor, a mother, a wife, and the increased duties of SMA News Editor. She also tries to keep time aside for herself and friends, both old and new.

Reflect and Refresh By Dr Tina Tan, Deputy Editor

A SENIOR once told me she did her best thinking while in the shower (you know who you are). She explained that she simply didn't have the chance to mull over problems or meditate about her patients, until those precious few minutes with running water. And she's right. Not about the shower, but about the time we have to ponder.

We're all busy professionals in an industry that is, at its heart, about service. Our daily responsibilities, and the many hats each of us wears, do entail a sacrifice of time and energy. Therefore, precious pockets of time that we can gather for our own thoughts are not something to be taken for granted. Because when else would your mind be allowed to consolidate the day's events, to ruminate on difficulties and successes, and to simply think?

This month's theme led me to Reflect (aptly so) on my short medical career thus far. It has had its ups and downs, but the adventure is far from over. Sometimes we get caught up in one too many things and end up losing sight of what we really should be doing. And by "we", I include myself as well. The most common thieves of our precious time would be admin duties, meetings, personal matters, training needs, and the list goes on.

It becomes easy to feel jaded, angry, and even spiteful with our attention and energy so divided. We question our actions, blame "the System", and might even rail at perceived injustices like a plebeian mob. We dread overloaded clinics, busy calls, and bad outcomes. The public (spurred on by sensationalistic media reporting) has a worsening opinion of doctors. Your colleague from another specialty is twisting your arm about something, acting like a pressure cooker on your already frazzled mind. That one patient just happens to drive us up the wall for whatever reason. But just Reflect - have we considered that we are missing the forest for the trees?

Remember those days of youth and idealism when you wanted to study medicine to "help people" and perhaps "save the world"? Do you remember how enthusiastic you were back then? Perhaps they have dimmed somewhat with the realities of life. Perhaps you're too tired or busy to even think about it. "Compassion?" you ask. "I just want to survive my clinic/call/(insert appropriate word)!"

It takes great strength to pull back from all of that and remember why you go to work every day. It's certainly not for the pay (at least, in public sector). And for those in the private sector, it's not all about the pay. Every decision you make helps patients who look to you, their treating physician, for the solution to their conditions. And sometimes, that's all we have to remember. We need to recollect why we came to medicine, and what drew us to this calling. Oh, you've forgotten? Well, drag it out from the dusty recesses of your mind and shake off the mould of time, weariness, and cynicism.

There is meaning to your daily work. There is purpose in the tedious toils of your responsibilities. It's what you make of it that counts.

So whether you conduct your Reflecting and Refreshing with time that has been meticulously carved out (as the more obsessive-compulsive among us may do), or in a haphazard fashion (as those with young kids can relate to), just do it. Refresh your tired mind with the knowledge that you've helped someone today. Reflect on the idealism of your youth which guided your career choice now.

Have a happy new year. And remember... Reflect, and Refresh. ■



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