

MOVING FORWARD

This year is Singapore's Jubilee year and we have come so far as a country in such a short period of time. What have we done and what more can we do? We ask five past Presidents of SMA to share their thoughts and wishes for the nation and the profession.



Remembering Those who Served before Us

By Dr Lee Pheng Soon

Dr Lee has a Fellowship in Pharmaceutical Medicine from the UK Royal Colleges of Medicine. He works fulltime in industry and part-time as a GP. Sometimes still referred to as "The SARS President", he remembers how every member of the 44th SMA Council stood tall to be counted on when the call came, to serve SMA and the medical profession, even after returning exhausted from caring for their patients in those dark days. What an honour it is to have stood shoulder to shoulder with such doctors!

When I trained as a student in Toa Payoh Hospital in the late 1970s, sometimes students would sit at the nurses' station while waiting for their tutors, helping nurses sharpen reusable stainless steel injection needles on a whetstone meant for a knife. These were to be sterilised with glass syringes, for reuse later on that day and thrown away only when they were too short for use. With Singapore's progress comes so much improvement and technological advancement that many younger specialists cannot even imagine that such "early days" occurred. And incidentally, needles are just one illustration of how far we have come in so short a time.

Many older doctors from these early days are still among us, some retired and others still practising. Let us not forget them. We could perhaps offer them a little more time, patience and respect when they are our patients. Our turn to appreciate this will come one day. One of my earliest memories of "old style mutual professional courtesy" was the collegiality shown by Prof Ransome to my father, a GP, when I was brought in for a second opinion on the heart murmur picked up by the school health physician. Despite being busy, he was careful, allowing time for questions before he gave his opinion, "A functional murmur, Lian Chye, in my opinion. I wouldn't worry." He used my father's full given name when he spoke, gave a diagnosis and offered a prescription (to the parent) in just a few words — doctor to doctor, being neither dismissive nor condescending. To this day, it was the mutual courtesy between two doctors — though clearly of different stature and of different ages but above all, of the same profession — that remains in my mind. I contrast this with a recent story I heard of our attitude toward retired doctors, still mentally more than able, who cannot get enough continuing medical education (CME) points to remain "one of us" just because they are wheelchair bound or visually impaired. They received no help from their peers, who preferred to "go by the book".

My wishes for the decades ahead? It is not further advancement of medical science, which will anyway surely come. It is these two: Within society, I hope for a better understanding of the role of the doctor in patients' lives, with patients taking full personal responsibility for their earlier choices of lifestyle and alternatives to conventional "western medicine". Within the medical profession, I hope we will find the extra measure of professional courtesy to older doctors within our busy schedules. It is not good enough to just acknowledge them as another member of Singapore's Pioneer Generation. They were Pioneers in our Profession, who had served under circumstances beyond the imagination of most of us now.



Together We Grow

By Dr Chong Yeh Woei

Dr Chong was SMA President from 2009 to 2012 and is a member of the 56th SMA Council. He has been in private practice since 1993 and has seen his fair share of the human condition. He pines for a good pinot noir, loves the FT Weekend and of course, wishes for world peace...

I have been a member of SMA since graduation and have been active in the Association since 1998. In these three decades, I have seen the organisation grow from strength to strength. A defining moment was SARS in 2003. In the midst of that chaotic situation, the Association gathered its resources and helped GPs and specialists in the private sector handle the deadly threat.

We have seen many changes since including the H1N1 pandemic, withdrawal of the Guideline on Fees, the introduction of the residency programme and the legal issues in the Singapore Medical Council.

Going forward the challenges are huge; we have the relentless march of advances in clinical application of molecular science, pharmaceuticals, biologics, prosthesis and medical devices. We are feeling the seismic shifts in the rebalancing of primary and tertiary care, the moves of the state in insurance and payer mechanisms and the consumerisation of healthcare as patients want to be empowered in deciding where, when and how they wish to consume their healthcare dollar.

All this is playing out with fast broadband and smartphone penetration and the entrance of technology companies into the healthcare space. We will soon see the next "Google", "Apple" or "Alibaba" of healthcare emerging.

I am convinced that the Association is the vehicle for all of us in the profession to navigate, grow, adapt and eventually transcend these massive shifts. To this end; I ask, cajole and plead with all doctors to throw their support behind the leadership of the Association in membership, spirit and resolve.



SG50 – A Tribute to an Independent Nation and Ageing Better

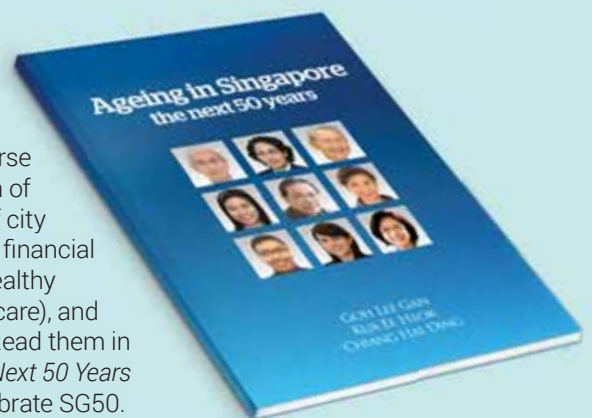
By A/Prof Goh Lee Gan

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan is a Fellow of the College of Family Physicians Singapore; Royal College of General Practitioners, Australia; Royal College of General Practitioners, UK; Academy of Family Physicians, Malaysia and also a Fellow of World Organisation of Family Doctors (Wonca). He is a past president of Wonca Asia Pacific Region and past President of SMA.

The story of Singapore post-1965 stirs the hearts of Singaporeans (and non-Singaporeans alike) while making some eyes misty. I pay tribute to the people and leaders of Singapore, both past and present, who have worked hard to ensure the survival and sustainability of Singapore.

We are on the threshold of another 50 years. Challenges ahead include sustaining our economic achievements, creating a city for all ages, and changing the mindset on ageing, from one of doom and gloom to that of celebration. Indeed, the ability to grow old and hoary is the greatest achievement of mankind. We need to modulate the Shakespearean description of ageing in *As You Like It* – "Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history, is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything". We can age better.

What every healthcare provider needs to do in the coming decade is to successfully mentor present and future Singaporeans on how to age better as a life course approach. The Singapore formula of many helping hands, the vision of city for all ages, and the four pillars of financial independence, ageing in place, healthy ageing (through chronic disease care), and active ageing is an open secret. Read them in the book *Ageing in Singapore the Next 50 Years* written by several doctors to celebrate SG50.





A Healthy Nation

By A/Prof Chin Jing Jih

A/Prof Chin was the President of SMA from 2012 to 2015. He is a geriatrician in Tan Tock Seng Hospital with an interest in ethics, professionalism and systems of care.

Singapore turns 50 this year. For most of us, this is an appropriate point in our lives to take stock of what we have done. But it is also a good point in one's life to look ahead. The Chinese philosopher Confucius once said that by the age of fifty, one should be sufficiently wise to know the decree of heaven (“五十而知天命”).

Do we know what is in store for Singapore in the next 50 years and more? Maybe not, but what we do know is that the well-being of Singapore in the coming years will very much depend on the health of her people. Without a doubt, Singapore has made remarkable progress over the last 50 years in public health and combating various diseases. However, the nation's rapidly ageing population demands a new dimension in our approach. We need to see, in the coming years, a definitive shift in the emphasis of our healthcare model. We need to make the transition from disease care to healthcare, from episodic care to planned primary care and from crisis care to preventive care. Singapore will also need to see greater and more innovative adoption of technology in healthcare in order to provide more precise, efficient and cost-effective healthcare.

The aim is certainly not for robotics and technologies to replace humans, but to free up healthcare professionals' time, so that they can better provide the personalised touch needed by patients. Illness is a human experience and healing is a human activity that is irreplaceable by robots and technologies. And finally, it is my personal wish that we begin to see staying healthy and away from disease as part of the nation's total defence. For a nation can only be strong if its people are healthy. It leaves me to wish Singapore a happy 50th birthday, with many more good years to come.



Singapore Healthcare —

Growing from Good to Great

By A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean is an adjunct associate professor at the Division of Family Medicine, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. He is a past President of SMA (1996–1999), past president of the College of Family Physicians Singapore (2000–2006) and director of the National Healthcare Group board (2000–2006). His clinical practice spans family medicine, internal medicine and psychotherapy.

Singapore moved from third world to first world status in a mere 50 years and the healthcare system developed in tandem. Now, where do we go from here?

In the rapid progression to level up healthcare, we needed to adopt best practices and avoid fragmentation of care that is evident in some developed societies. The rapid pace of our development threw up challenges as we progressed. The financing of our healthcare is a case in point; our national philosophy of “many helping hands” and individual savings for times of need have enabled Singaporeans to lessen the healthcare burden on the State, through the use of Medisave, Medishield and for the needy, Medifund. Looking to the future, we need to think of universal healthcare coverage for life.

To address these tough challenges, policy and professional leaders need to have synergy to further improve our healthcare system. There is a need to strengthen institutions to engender health and long-term care as our population ages. Strategic financing is essential in ensuring unity of clinical and financing governance for patients across the panoply of providers. Training and clinical practice need to be better aligned to sustainability. Healthcare literacy in society also has to be improved to ensure optimal use of healthcare resources.

Growing from a good to great healthcare system is not easy, but it is worth striving to ensure that good quality, sustainable and accessible healthcare is available for every Singaporean through life in the years to come. ♦