



Pioneer GPs and medical students gathered at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel for the SG50 Appreciation Dinner for Pioneer GPs.

HONOURING PIONEER GPs

By Agency for Integrated Care

When West Coast Clinic and Surgery's Dr Yeo Kwan Ching started working as a General Practitioner (GP), primary care was not widely practised in Singapore. Young doctors were well versed in their areas of specialisation such as neurology or obstetrics and gynecology, but these were too narrow to provide primary care for families and children.

However, primary care has grown dramatically in the last couple of decades, and is now commonplace. "Medical students these days have to go through an entire Family Medicine module that covers all disciplines. I think young doctors in Singapore today have much more exposure, and are definitely better equipped as GPs than the previous generation," Dr Yeo explained during the SG50 Appreciation Dinner for Pioneer GPs on 30 October 2015. More than 150 pioneer GPs were honoured for the critical roles they played in the growth of Singapore's healthcare sector over the years.

The dinner – jointly organised by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS), and the Ministry of Health (MOH) – was held at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, and was graced by Minister for Health Mr Gan Kim Yong as well as Special Guest, Minister of State for Health Dr Lam Pin Min.

About 50 medical students – from Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, as

well as the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School – also attended. They were there to pay tribute to the pioneer GPs and learn from their journey as doctors.

With a string quartet playing in the background, students and pioneer GPs mingled at a cocktail reception preceding the dinner. While many of the pioneer GPs were happy to catch up with ex-schoolmates and other doctors, some also reached out to the students, engaging them with stories about their careers and what being a medical student was like back in the day. Students and GPs continued their lively interactions even after taking their seats in the ballroom.



Pioneer GPs and medical students engaging in lively interactions over dinner.

Doctors and guests enjoying the presentations given by guest speakers.



In his welcome speech, Minister Gan highlighted the importance of the GP's role in the healthcare system. "GPs have a unique doctor-patient relationship that enables them to empower their patients to make good lifestyle choices," he asserts. "The trust and familiarity GPs enjoy with patients and their family members allow them to advocate for their patient's wellbeing. The family doctor's holistic understanding of patients' needs is the essence of good family medicine. It is also key to keeping our care cost-effective and sustainable in the long run."

Minister Gan also thanked the pioneer GPs for being on Singapore's frontline, safeguarding the nation's health in times of crises, especially during the SARS and H1N1 outbreaks as well as the current heavy haze. "We salute the healthcare teams and GPs who played a key role in successfully containing the outbreaks. And we remember our colleagues who sacrificed their lives in saving others," he said.

As the attendees tucked into a sumptuous eight-course Chinese feast, presentations were given by veterans of the primary care sector. CFPS President Associate Professor Lee Kheng Hock reviewed the Primary Care landscape over the past 50 years, tracing it back to its inception in 1969. Ex-president of CFPS, Associate Professor Goh Lee Gan and pioneer GP Dr James Chang shared their life stories and experiences in academia and private healthcare respectively.

Both doctors and students were full of praise for the event. Dr Mary Wee of Rochor Centre Clinic commented, "I really appreciate the thought put into this event to thank us pioneer GPs. It was also great that the young and old could come together to share ideas and experiences."

Yeo Wei Ren, a first-year student from the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, also enjoyed the dinner thoroughly. "I found the event very well organised. Although there is much literature documenting the growth of healthcare in Singapore over the years, the presentations and anecdotes from the pioneer GPs made it all come alive," he said.



Dr Chang sharing his experiences in the healthcare sector with attendees.



AIC will continue to engage GPs and involve them in events and new initiatives.