



SHAPING THE FUTURE GP

Last year, I met up with a few of my secondary school mates over coffee. The conversation topic naturally gravitated to what we do for a living.

My childhood friend looked in my direction as he said, "Oh, I am a researcher into sensors. I have spent my entire career studying how sensors work and I certainly hope that we can use much of what I know to improve the lives of Singaporeans."

Immediately, the imagery of my kids and I playing Kinect Star Wars on the Xbox came to mind: slashing aliens and storm troopers by waving our hands and feet frantically in the air.

"I intend to use sensor technology to predict when an elderly person will fall..." My friend brought me back to reality, focusing on something more useful than gaming.

Technology, innovation and gadgets are very much integral parts as he said, of our present and near future. They will enhance our GP practices and change the way we see and manage our patients. Google has already empowered

our population so much that some people may even have more medical knowledge than doctors.

GP PRACTICE

Clinic management systems

As it is today, many newer GP clinics are equipped with clinic management systems (CMS) on networked computers. These systems help GPs to manage their accounts, stocks and patients' dispensing records.

A few younger GPs operating in tiny Housing and Development Board shop units utilise electronic medical records to save physical space. In fact, the software has been a blessing. It not only saves space and helps GPs to work more efficiently, it also enables them to generate analytical reports to improve patient care and business.

Of course, with the increased amount of time spent staring at the screen, less time is spent looking at the faces of the patients. This can compromise the communication process and result in some patients being unhappy.

Practice management

Some CMS come with a queue system that manages the clinic

queues, doing away with the traditional call bells. The software can buzz the patients on their phones when the doctor is ready to see them. Others come with appointment systems, allowing patients to book their appointments in advance. Reminders will be sent via text messages to the patients a few days prior to their scheduled appointments.

Claim applications for schemes such as the Community Health Assist Scheme and the Chronic Disease Management Programme can be submitted via a browser. A few of the CMS in the market are now able to help submit such claim applications directly once the GP closes the consultation on the CMS.

Connectivity

With the arrival of cheap and affordable fibre and mobile broadband, an increasing number of colleagues are turning to the Internet to search for research papers. Even Google Images can enhance consultations, as we can show our patients how some signs and symptoms look like.

House calls

If these CMS were available on smart devices and can access our clinics' servers, GPs on house calls will be able to better manage the patients at their homes with the information.

With the help of an app from a local telco, GPs doing house calls can even collect their fees at the patients' homes at the end of each consultation.

APPS FOR GP PRACTICES

I was chatting with a fellow GP, Dr Choo Kay Wee, who is an early adopter of apps in his practice. The app he designed allows his patients to book appointments with him either at his clinic or at their own homes. It even allows his patients to make payment via PayPal to secure his services upon fixing the appointment.

Dr Choo also uses the app to share medical information with his patients. Similarly, they can also check out medical products and services such as supplements, screening packages and medical equipment through the app.

VIRTUAL MULTI-GP PRACTICE

In the private sector, GPs often operate alone and the loneliness can be upsetting. This deprives GPs of the benefits of working in a team. In come messaging apps with group chat functions, such as WhatsApp and LINE.

About a year back, a few of my classmates started a WhatsApp group. In it, we chat about everything – our kids, continuing medical education, gossip, where to eat, who to refer, comments on policies and the benefits of various schemes and managed healthcare schemes.

This virtual connection and these instant exchanges grant us the benefits of a multi-doctor practice despite the distance. In fact, our

group has a member in Perth and another in Kuching.

The haze scheme last year was refined due to the feedback received from this chat group. I am really thankful for such technology and a bunch of good and cohesive classmates.

MOH GP AMBASSADOR SCHEME

I am very glad and excited that the Ministry of Health (MOH) is starting a GP ambassador scheme to network all the GPs. The scheme does not specify the platform for connection or restrict the type of information shared. I am very enthusiastic as there is finally some effort to truly unite the plethora of GPs in private practice. MOH is organising a seminar to share more about this effort on 9 July 2016. Look out for more information in your email and snail mails.

NATIONAL HEALTH RECORDS

Mr Khaw Boon Wan, a former Minister for Health, had the vision of linking clinical records so that patients can have seamless care between institutions and sectors. It is not an easy task. We have learnt through the grapevine that MOH has been trying very hard to achieve that.

One very useful tool today is the National Electronic Health Records (NEHR), which is available to all GPs in the private sector. One of my seniors, Dr Theresa Yap, often says that the absence of the NEHR is equivalent to walking without two legs. For those of us who have yet to have accessed the records, you may want to enquire with MOH. What's best, it is a free service.

From what my GP friends in New Zealand say, their system allows patients to move seamlessly from one location to another without

losing their medical history and records. Rumour has it that their system is available for free to their GPs too.

There is so much more that information technology, innovation and gadgets can do to improve the level of care for our patients. We should harness their potential.

PARTING SHOT

Many of us often shudder at the thought of healthcare workers being replaced by robots and the Internet. Instead of worrying, we would be better off thinking of how to adopt them into our daily practice. ♦

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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Dr Leong Choon Kit is a GP in the private sector. He is an advocate of the ideal doctor which is exemplified by one who is good at his clinical practice, teaching, research and leadership in the society. His idea of social leadership includes contributing back to society and lending a voice to the silent.