



HONOUR THE PAST EMBRACE THE FUTURE

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is also a member of the current National General Practitioner Advisory Panel. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.



60 years old.

That is how old our national medical association will be this year. After coming such a long way, how should we celebrate this monumental milestone?

While we ponder this thought, we should look back at some of the milestones we have achieved along the way. I recall the dark days when we helped our nation battle SARS. At short notice, we had to source for N95 masks, draw up standard operating procedures for clinics to demarcate their spaces to handle suspected cases, and gather doctors in batches, all dressed in personal protective equipment, for training on how to handle the crisis. We had a "déjà vu" experience when the H1N1 epidemic happened and we continue to think about how to prepare our doctors for future epidemics and pandemics.

We also remember the Guideline on Fees (GOF) that we started upon the request of the late Dr Kwa Soon Bee, then Permanent Secretary for Health and Director of Medical Services. We remember the anguish

we felt when we were told that the GOF could be deemed anti-competition and we had to withdraw the guideline. The GOF has recently been reincarnated as the benchmark of surgical fees published by the Ministry of Health.

One of our annual events is the SMA Lecture. We have, over the years invited learned speakers, including non-doctors, to be our SMA Lecturer. Some examples include Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, Mr Ngiam Tong Dow, Mr K Shanmugam and Prof Tommy Koh. They were invited because they have made significant contributions to the field of medicine and the community. The former Dean of NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan, delivered the SMA Lecture last year on the Future of Medical Education. How will we top what has come before, for this year's SMA Lecture?

Leaving the topic of milestones that the SMA has achieved, I would like to focus on directions in which I think the Ministry and the healthcare professional community should partner to move our country towards.

On the primary care front, I was told that primary care doctors would be busier this year as compared to previous years, as more measures would be implemented to improve the health of our citizens. We are already fighting the war on diabetes, managing dementia and mental problems in the community and helping our population age gracefully.

In the coming months, there will be more focus on moving patients under acute hospital care back to the community. The intent is to get our patients to receive appropriate care in the community instead of crowding our acute hospitals. Various initiatives are in place to empower our GP colleagues to do more for our patients at the primary care level, instead of sending them back to the tertiary centres due to a paucity of capabilities in the community. The Primary Care Network is one such move, bringing nurses and case managers together to help our GP colleagues provide team-based care and further enhance the capabilities of GP clinics. Diabetes foot checks and diabetic retinal photography services are also deployed to the community for better accessibility and better care in our war on diabetes.

Our medical students should also have their training set in the community instead of focusing on the more exotic cases seen in acute hospitals. They should be trained to manage the bread-and-butter medical conditions faced daily by our community.

Our primary care colleagues who have interests in mental health should also upskill themselves to manage psychiatric patients in the community. Those of us interested in providing care for geriatric and demented patients should also upskill ourselves.

From healthcare to health

We have talked about healthcare, but in reality, we need to emphasise on the health of the population. We need to go back to the old adage of "prevention is better than cure". So, in moving beyond healthcare to health, we will be revisiting preventive measures such as healthy lifestyles, exercise, proper diets, smoking cessation and limiting alcohol consumption. Proper washing of hands and wearing of face masks to cut down transmission of infections should be emphasised. We can reduce vector diseases by doing our part in the eradication of mosquitoes.

In addition, we may also attempt to prevent diabetes and kidney diseases through early detection of pre-diabetes and early kidney changes like microalbuminuria. It is possible to reverse these chronic diseases with proper evidence-based intervention. Health screening programmes, such as the enhanced Screen for Life, are useful for early detection of chronic diseases. This should be combined with motivation for behavioural change and maintaining the desired changes in our patients.

Sweep your decks clean and be prepared for more changes in the coming months. Keep your spirits up, go with the flow and ride the wave; when you encounter difficulties, you have a friend in SMA. We may not be able to solve every one of your problems, but at least we will help to set your sails in the right direction.

Happy 60th anniversary, SMA! We have come a long way and we have more challenges ahead; some will be new while others are revisits from our old friends and foes. How many of those in our fraternity can I count on to face such future challenges as brothers and sisters in arms? ♦

SMA60
For Doctors For Patients
Years

*Happy 60th
Birthday, SMA!*

SMA turns 60 this year, and you're the reason we're still standing strong!
Visit <http://bit.ly/HappyBirthdaySMA> to pen your well-wishes for SMA as we celebrate this amazing milestone.