

STANDING Together

in the Face of COVID-19



When news of the then unknown coronavirus disease – COVID-19 – first broke, nobody expected it to hit our shores so quickly and extensively. And when the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition was raised to Orange on 7 February 2020 in Singapore, we knew it was a rallying cry to take up our posts at the battlefield.

Teamwork and communication were paramount and as a teamlet lead, I assisted my clinic head with providing critical ground updates to colleagues, so as to keep pace with rapidly changing clinical guidelines. I ensured the well-being of my team as work can be stressful, given the heightened vigilance and continually evolving situation. Donning personal protective equipment for hours when working in the segregation area and fever clinics, we persevered with meticulous history-taking and clinical assessment of patients with acute respiratory infections and fever. Split teams within the polyclinic, with clinicians working in separate teams, were rolled out to achieve safe distancing and as part of business continuity plans.

Safe distancing among colleagues persisted throughout lunch breaks over teleconferenced continuing medical education in separate rooms. In addition, medication extension and home medicine delivery were arranged for eligible patients to reduce clinic attendance and minimise infection risk.

We brace ourselves for challenging days ahead as the pandemic progresses, cheered on by the heart-warming support and care packs from the public and our colleagues. We, as front line healthcare workers, will fight hard to protect our patients and our Singapore. There is light at the end of the tunnel and together, we will overcome! #SGUnited

Dr Victoria Leung, Family Physician and Associate Consultant, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics

Editor's note:

As you read this, Singapore would be into its first, and hopefully only, extension of the circuit breaker (#CCB). It's been a long journey and I hope that everyone is coping well. For better or worse, the marathon isn't over, though I hope we have made progress by now.

We continue our series of featuring the voices of doctors in various settings as we continue to fight COVID-19. We hope these snippets bring encouragement to all.

This Mask

This mask I wear, through which I breathe
This mask covering mouth and nose.
This mask which protects my lungs beneath
This mask, that prompts here this prose.

This mask, that protects me from you
from COVID and other such things.
But it also protects you from me too,
from my halitosis and judgemental grins.

I'm not a superhero, and I don't wear a cape.
I'm just a healthcare worker with a mask
I don't need bubble tea, (I'm already outta shape)
if you want to know what I want, just ask!

So don't stay home for me, for this is my job.
A calling to serve, with pride.
Especially when donned in full PPE, to swab,
and sweating, even from my backside.

Stay home instead for my mum, my dad,
for my aunts and uncles too.
I'm not there to take care of them, it's sad.
So you take care of them, by staying home with your crew.

This mask, it hides my smiles, my fears,
my happiness, or when I feel blue.
But one thing it doesn't hide are my tears
But lucky for me...I wear goggles too.

Dr Ian Mathews, Consultant, Emergency Medicine, National University Hospital



“Adversity introduces a man to himself.”

– Albert Einstein

I’m an ENT consultant. Very early on, before we knew much about the disease called COVID-19, doctors from the Tan Tock Seng Hospital Division of Surgery had been asked to volunteer at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases screening centre.

We saw heads of departments stepping up to the plate and consultants on the brink of private practice giving their last contribution to public service before leaving. There were also our medical officers and registrars who didn’t complain one bit despite the pressure of examinations (which had yet to be postponed) and increase in workload. Our nurses, clinic assistants and paraclinical staff were also co-opted to work in unfamiliar roles.

Every time that I don my mask, cap, gown and goggles and step into the screening centre, I feel grateful that we are protected in our battle. Our colleagues in the UK and US aren’t so lucky.

I feel proud to have friends who have my back. When I volunteered to do high risk tracheostomies for our COVID-19 patients, there were many colleagues who stepped up as well. That’s as close to taking a bullet as we get in our line of work. I’m not sure if it was guided by some sense of chivalry, but the courage and strength that everyone around me has shown inspires me every day.

Together, we shall overcome.

Dr Valerie Tay, Consultant, Tan Tock Seng Hospital

Over the years, one learns to go to the tearoom. Hungry? Tearoom. Clinical conundrum? Tearoom. Administrative challenge? Tearoom. Bored? Tearoom. Angry? Tearoom. Happy? Tearoom. Urge for number 1? Tearoom (there is an adjoining washroom). Basically, you go to tearoom for everything, at least in the Singapore General Hospital Division of Anaesthesiology.

Usually a hive of activities, it is now often quiet. The table that usually seats upwards of ten people, is now limited to four, in the name of safe distancing. Previously a place where we would rub shoulders with each other, today we rub sanitiser on our own hands (on arrival and before leaving).

It was never this empty during office hours. After all, this small tearoom serves close to two hundred of us. One cannot help but feel a little melancholic stepping into the tearoom these days.

However, we are not lonely or helpless. Far from it! We remain upbeat and optimistic. Thanks to WhatsApp and other social media applications, we are never truly alone. The whole of our division is literally one click away. Clinical conundrum? Post it on WhatsApp (minus the identifiers, of course, we are all professionals), and helpful advice would land on your phone within seconds, often with the latest evidence or guidelines. Help in the physical form may suddenly show up in your operating theatre too! Bored? Just watch the latest cat video someone shared in the chat group. Our old tearoom lives on virtually on WhatsApp.

We are so fortunate to go thru this current pandemic with a wealth of resources, both physical and virtual. Let’s lean on each other virtually and together we shall prevail. Looking forward to a crowded tearoom again. Can’t wait. ♦

Dr Yeoh Chuen Jye, Division of Anaesthesiology, Singapore General Hospital

