

2	.....	President's Forum – Protecting the Doctor
3	.....	Editorial – Narrative Medicine – Beyond Pills and Scalpels
4	.....	Personally Speaking – Advice for New Factory Owners: Other Uses of Autoclave Machines
6	.....	Garfield – Letter to President of SMA by A Patient on "Upgraded Practice"
7	.....	On Being A Patient – Coping with Cancer – A Doctor as Patient (Part 1)
9	.....	On Being A Doctor – Death in the Clinic

## Surviving in A World of Germs:

# What You Must Know About Common Infections

By Dr Tham Tat Yean

This year's SMA Annual Convention will focus on the theme of Infections. It is co-organised by the Society of Infectious Disease (Singapore) and supported by the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). We are honoured to have Dr Teo Ho Pin to be the Guest-of-Honour. Dr Teo is a Member of Parliament and the President of CASE.

The Convention will have a bilingual public forum on 21 April (see page 2), Saturday and a symposium for healthcare professionals (doctors, registered nurses and pharmacists) on 22 April, Sunday. We have invited a list of well-known speakers from various institutions. This year we have included three family physicians in the speaker panel for the public forum. This is

to add breadth to the forum presentation from the general practice perspective. In the public forum, the speakers will be discussing common infections from the symptomatology viewpoint. For the professional symposium, a host of relevant issues like antibiotic resistance, community acquired infections, HIV infection and HFMD will be discussed. ■

### A NEW ERA OF INFECTIONS

There has been a dramatic decrease in the incidence of certain infectious diseases for several decades. The availability of potable water, introduction of safe sewage disposal facilities and improved housing conditions have made a major impact on diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, malaria and typhoid. Mass vaccination has led to the eradication of smallpox, mumps, measles, rubella, pertussis and diphtheria.

However, infectious diseases continue to cause serious morbidity and mortality despite advances in the field of medicine. Vaccines have yet to be developed for many pathogens; public health measures have not been fully successful in controlling malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and other diseases in many parts of the world. Disease control may fail for several reasons – deficiencies in scientific knowledge, lack of public health awareness and inadequately funded health policy measures.

An additional twist to infection control efforts is the resilience of viruses and the tenacity of bacteria have led to the emergence of new infections and the evolution of old ones. Emerging infections (defined as new, re-emerging, or drug-resistant infections whose incidence had increased or threatened to increase in the near future) pose a serious threat to humans. There appears to be trouble ahead, with new or more vicious virus strains on our doorsteps. HIV used to be the classic example. Nowadays, we also fear the Mad Cow variants, Nipah virus and Foot-and-Mouth disease. Even the usually benign Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease created some panic locally when several paediatric deaths were reported. Moreover, antibiotic resistance is redefining the challenges that physicians face when treating community and hospital acquired infections.

We can be quite sure that new infectious diseases will continue to emerge. We must exercise vigilance against the classic infections that we thought we have overcome. At the same time, it is vital that we prepare for battle against a new breed of emerging infectious diseases. In some ways, the battle has already begun.

### PROFESSIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Sunday, 22 April, 2.00-5.30 pm  
Free Admission for SMA  
members, \$10.00 for  
non-SMA members

Introduction and Welcome Address  
 by Chairman,  
 Dr Tan Ban Hock

Keynote address: What can be done  
 about Antibiotic Resistance?  
 By Dr Wong Sin Yew, President  
 of the Society of Infectious  
 Disease (Singapore)

Clinical Management of Community  
 Acquired Infections:

- Respiratory Infections  
By Paul Tambyah
- Urinary Tract Infections  
By Dr Lam Mun San
- Sexually Transmitted Disease  
By Dr Cheong Lai Leng

HIV Infection - An Update  
 By Dr Leo Yee Sin

Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease - An Update  
 By Dr Chong Chia Yin



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