



When the tsunami swept across South Asia on 26 December 2004, many lost lives and homes, and faced the threat of disease as basic needs of hygiene, sanitation and personal health became compromised.

As doctors, many of us felt a natural inclination to reach out to these people in need. A fortunate few can spend time off work and head to the disaster areas to serve, but many of us cannot due to constraints at the workplace. We thus thought hard about how we could contribute in a directed manner from here whilst leveraging on our existing resources. Then, we chanced upon the Sri Lanka High Commission in our hunt, and received a clear indication from them with regard to their need for medical supplies. Eight pages of requests for specific medical items came through the fax within minutes of our call. With the support of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA), the project took off on a quick footing as members were notified through emails and the SMA website.

The response was heartwarming. We received immediate offers of donation within the same day. Dr Low How Cheong of Healthwise Medical Clinic and Surgery placed a significant order for oral medication and injectables with a drug company, which was promptly delivered the next working day. Dr Rodney Lim of Healthlink Medical Clinic and Surgery called and offered bags of medication which practically filled my whole car. We were also pleasantly surprised to receive calls from Dr Danny Soon of Lilly-NUS Centre for Clinical Pharmacology, with offers of infusion fluids that eventually filled two van loads. Pharmacist Ms Chong Yi San from Tan Tock Seng Hospital Outpatient Pharmacy contributed through a significant donation, as did a patient of ours, after waiting in our clinic lobby which was filled with stacked boxes of drugs. Many more came forward to contribute. (See side box.)

When we conceived the project, we took efforts to ensure full accountability of every donated item. It was

Doing Our Part

By Dr Eric Chiam & Dr Lisa Chen

highly important that every single pill was delivered to the Sri Lanka High Commission, and handover to their officials was properly documented. Donors received acknowledgement slips. Stock-taking was performed daily. The SMA was also updated regularly. To date, we have collectively donated 113,867 items, comprising a diverse range of oral medication, syringes, injectables, gowns, masks, infusion fluids and much more.

It has been a wholesomely good experience for us to do something apart from the mundane tasks of seeing coughs and colds. It is important as we practise that we continually look beyond the four walls of our consultation room. How do we seek out those in need? What ways can we meet these needs? Can we as doctors do it together? Going forward, we will persevere in identifying needs in which we can serve the community further. One idea to explore is perhaps in collecting donations of medication for charity nursing homes.

After all, bakeries donate unsold bread to these homes. Why shouldn't doctors do the same? ■

Others who answered the call for help:

Fong Yoke Poh

Dr Rodney Lim,
Healthlink Medical Clinic & Surgery

Dr Lau Kit Wan,
Lau Clinic & Surgery

Dr Loo Yu Ming,
Comwell Medical Clinic

Dr Low How Cheong,
Healthlink Medical Clinic & Surgery

Dr Soh Liang Joseph,
Clinic 116

Dr Soh Wah Ngee,
Silver Cross Medical Centre

Dr Tan Hui Mien Helen,
Medicare Family Clinic

Dr Tan Poh Heng,
T&T Clinic & Surgery

Dr Teo Boon See,
Camry Medical Centre

Dr Tham Tat Yean,
Frontier Healthcare Holdings

IMC HealthCare (International Medical Clinic)

Lilly - NUS Centre for Clinical Pharmacology

Singapore Medical Association

Tan Tock Seng Hospital Outpatient Pharmacy



About the authors:

Eric and Lisa graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1996. Today, they practise at Dayspring Medical Clinic and love nothing better than returning home each day to their three lovely Yorkshire Terriers. Constantly on the lookout for fun, their main motivation in life is always the next holiday together. On a more serious note, should you have any good ideas for medical community work, please write them at doctor@dayspringmedical.com.