

# President's Column

June 2020

by Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 27<sup>th</sup> Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

The past three months have been quite the rollercoaster since Covid-19 hit our shores. The pandemic has affected every part of our society, even more so when the circuit breaker measures to curtail its spread kicked in on 7 April. We are now into our second month, and we are all hoping that these measures will be able to reduce the community spread of Covid-19, and look forward to the easing of some of these measures in June.

Many of our colleagues have stepped up to the plate to fight the virus, whether it be in our own clinics, in the dormitories or the community care facilities at EXPO. We have had much community support, with many in Singapore clapping for our frontline staff on 30 March 2020. It was a real morale booster for the many who were working very hard to keep Singapore safe. In the words of one healthcare worker, the clapping was very encouraging. "It does brighten me up a little after a long day at work." *1*. (<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-gives-coronavirus-frontliners-a-round-of-applause>) One of our own FPs, Dr Julia Yuen has drawn a tribute to our frontline warriors: just what the doctor ordered!

We had to make many changes to address the needs of our trainees who could no longer meet face to face for lectures and seminars. With the help of our talented and dedicated secretariat, as well as the leadership, creativity and tenacity of our teaching faculty, we were able to exploit the wonders of information technology and bring

the courses online. Within the short space of a couple of weeks we were able to scale up our online capabilities and cater to all our programmes and trainees. As the saying goes, the show must go on, and it did, amazingly so! Dr Kenneth Tan recounts faithfully the journey they took to make this transition. Dr Nelson Wee's article chronicles the experiences of this transition in his article, and Dr Ng Liling and Dr Loo Yuxian share how they prepared their trainees for the MMed(FM) examinations.

Dr Mumtaz shares her journey to becoming a doctor. It is awe inspiring, and tells of courage and determination in the face of overwhelming odds. We are indeed glad that she has chosen the path of family medicine and welcome her into our fraternity.

Throughout the history of the College, we have been blessed by the help of many friends, many of whom are in other specialties. Their trust and belief in Family Medicine led them to give much assistance and support to the College to continue the work of training our GPs and FPs. One such friend was Dr Andre Wan, who was the instrumental author of a funding white paper presented to the Ministry of Health. This culminated in a substantial grant to support the fledgeling Graduate Diploma of Family Medicine, which has since gone on to train thousands of family physicians over the years. His passing on 4 May 2020 was a tremendous loss to our medical community, may he rest in peace.

■ CM

## Interview on TV *Facing my first pandemic running a clinic*

by Dr Chua Lee Lea Im, Council Member, College of Family Physicians Singapore

When I was asked to participate in a news interview of primary care doctors on how we are coping during this Covid19 pandemic, I agreed to what was initially thought to be a 30-minute non-live interview. I was quite surprised when it eventually evolved into a multi-day filmed feature, involving my clinic, patients, staff, colleagues and life at home. Its aim was to show how everyone had a part to play to cope with the crisis.

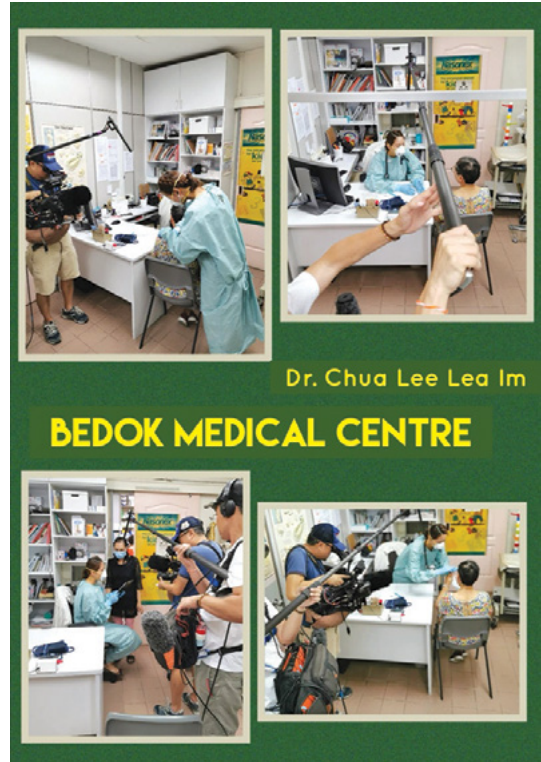
I thank my fellow doctor friends as well as non-medical friends for their support, and it is my hope that being featured on TV can help further garner continued support for my medical colleagues from the general public, because

we will need all those small gestures of encouragement and appreciation to keep us going. Every bit counts! Doctors are only human after all.

To the surprise of patients waiting in queue for clinic opening on a Monday, the filming crew directed my walking to the clinic to exaggerate my pregnancy. I was amused throughout the process of filming, learning from the crew on how to present oneself on television. Decidedly, I didn't apply makeup to hide under my N95 mask, but how else do you show a lady getting ready for work authentically? Thus, bear with me as you watch me stumble on the set and pardon my good intentions.

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Admittedly, I was less stressed at the beginning of the outbreak due to naivety and inexperience. However, now I fully empathize with the anxiety of fellow doctors who have to experience daily changes in protocol, face escalating number of cases in a matter of days, juggle the burgeoning number of tasks to delegate to our staff, and experience the increasing frustration at the general public who remain oblivious to the consequences of not heeding advice. Yes, mounting frustration indeed. These precautions are infinitely tedious but very necessary.



I must remind myself then, that the crisis also brings out the best in others. It is heartening to see my hospital and other GP colleagues reaching out, all of us holding virtual hands, and reassuring each other that we will pull through the toughest of times, together. May everyone stay safe and one day we will look back and thank the tough times that brought us all closer together as a fraternity. Keep calm, stay safe & carry on my friends!

■ CM