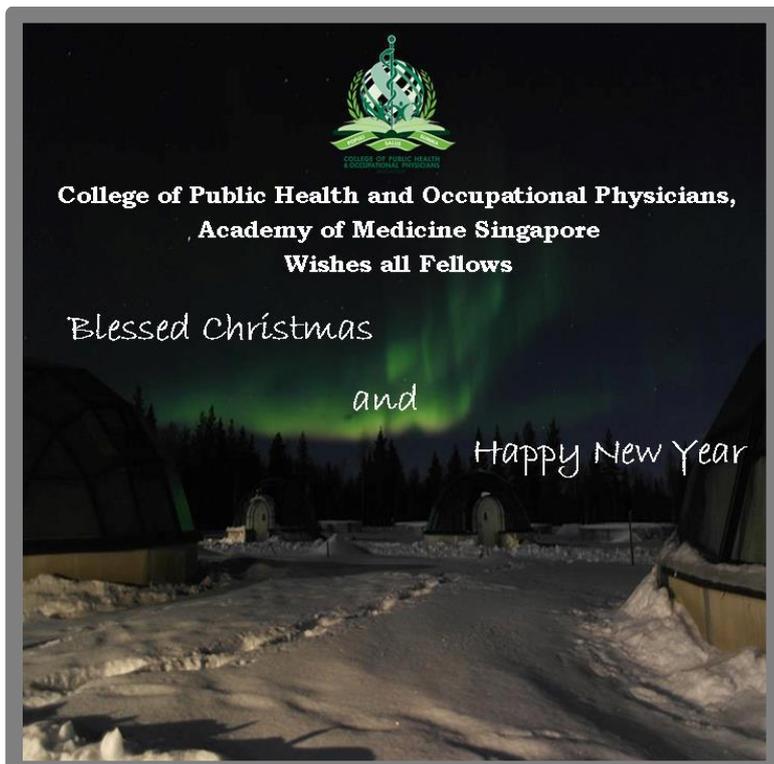




Issue 3  
December 2013

# College of Public Health & Occupational Physicians

## Newsletter



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Dr Eugene Shum addressing the fellows at the fellows lunch during the 8<sup>th</sup> PHOM Conference.



Dr Eugene Shum presenting token of appreciation to Prof John Ashton, at the 8<sup>th</sup> PHOM Conference.



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Greetings from the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians!

This has been a most fruitful year for the College. A central theme for the Academy and the College is professional partnerships and development. In 2013, the College organized two major events - the Inaugural General Meeting in February, and the 8th Public Health and Occupational Conference in August.

As we embarked on our journey as a College, we made good inroads on the international collaboration front. As part of the activities during our Inaugural General Meeting, we signed an MOU with the UK Faculty of Public Health (UKFPH). Our partnership with the UKFPH was further strengthened when Prof John Ashton, President, UKFPH, joined us during the 8th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference as a plenary speaker. Across the Atlantic, Dr Matthias Toh and I met Dr Mariam Alexander, then President, American College of Preventive Medicine at the Preventive Medicine Conference 2013 in Phoenix, Arizona, USA in February. We have a College Travel Assistance Fund and Fellows who are keen on linking up with our overseas counterparts can receive sponsorship from this fund.

The 8th Public Health and Occupational Conference was a great success. Please join me in congratulating Drs Matthias Toh and Mona Toh, co-Chairpersons, for putting together an excellent conference. The 9th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference will be held on the 28-29 August 2014. Dr Angela Chow, Chairperson, and her committee has been assembling a very exciting programme so do reserve these dates.

Last but not least, we held our annual get-together at the Line @ Shangri-la Hotel last month where Fellows were able to catch up with each other over a wonderful spread. We will be organizing more get-togethers next year. Do look out for more information coming your way.

Wishing you all a happy and prosperous year ahead!

- Dr Eugene Shum
- President

The 8<sup>th</sup> Public Health and Occupational Medicine (PHOM) Conference was successfully held on 29-30 August 2013 with around 300 participants attending the conference .

Permanent Secretary for Health, Mrs Tan Ching Yee, graced the opening ceremony. Her [opening speech](#) acknowledged the important role of public health & occupational professionals in health policies, as exemplified in managing the recent haze crisis. Her speech focused on the challenges presented to Singapore healthcare system within the changing demographic, epidemiologic and lifestyle landscape. She felt that more could be done to improve population health, through public health professionals' active roles in public health administration and surveillance, and their collaborative relationship with policy-makers and frontline operations staff to ensure smooth and effective implementation of public health policies.

Prof John R. Ashton , President , UK Faculty of Public Health, one of the two invited plenary speakers, spoke on "Twenty First Century Public Health- Living up to the Challenge. He was also the overseas panelist for the panel discussion on the Health Impact of the Singapore Population White Paper. Both sessions were very well received and the lively question and answer session at the panel discussion indicated participants' interest on the subject.

The conference theme of "ADVANCING THE HEALTH OF POPULATIONS" chosen by the organizing committee led by Dr Mona Toh and Dr Matthias Toh is the English translation of our newly formed College's motto, 'Populi Salus Summa'. The four tracks in the conference focused on issues facing the four population groups, namely the Ageing Population, the Adult Population, Youth and Children, and the Communities Most at Need. The diverse background of the speakers enabled the common needs and challenges of each population group to be discussed in greater depth during the sessions.

The 2-day conference gave participants ample time to interact and network with fellow Public Health & Occupational Health professionals. There was also a Fellows Lunch attended by some 30 fellows who congratulated Prof Goh Kee Tai for receiving his Achievement Award of 2013. Prof Goh gave a moving testimony of his rich work experience at the lunch.

Last but not least, we thank you all for your participation and enthusiasm at the conference, without which it would not have been a resounding success.

*By Dr Mona Toh and Dr Matthias Toh*



**"ADVANCING THE HEALTH OF POPULATIONS"**

# UPCOMING EVENT

Join us for the  
**9<sup>th</sup> Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference**

**28-29 August 2014**

*“Embracing Challenges in Building Healthy Communities”*

## Achievement Award 2013



The College's Achievement Award for 2013 was awarded to Prof Goh Kee Tai at the 8th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference on 29 August 2013. Mrs. Tan Ching Yee, Permanent Secretary (Health), presented the award to Prof Goh. The College Council congratulates Prof Goh on receiving the award.

# Resident's Column

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“Life is like a box of chocolates- you never know what you are gonna get.”  
- Forrest Gump

As a young idealistic junior college student, I could not wait to get out there and help people, to save the world, and I told myself the last thing I would do was to end up stuck in an office for the rest of my life. And so I chose to enter Medicine- after all, what could be more exciting than life as a doctor?

The five years of medical school zoomed by pretty quickly, though I must confess that the Community, Occupational and Family Medicine (COFM) posting passed rather slowly and painfully. I dreamed of perhaps being an endocrinologist, with the intricate workings of the human body at my fingertips; or perhaps –gasp- a neurologist, whose brains were surely wired differently from other mere mortals, despite whatever the neuro-anatomy textbook said.

During my final year in medical school though, my (then) girlfriend and I found out that the World Health Organization was offering a summer internship in Geneva for students. For some unknown reason (perhaps the thought of the Swiss Alps and Lindt chocolate), we were excited at the prospect and applied for the internship. Much to our disappointment, our applications were eventually unsuccessful, but unbeknownst to me, a small seed had been planted that would soon bear unexpected fruit.

During my time as a house officer, I saw that by the time patients entered the hospital with chronic diseases and their complications, it was too little, too late. I came to realize that patients' health and the broader socio-economic context in which they lived were closely intertwined, and became interested in the policies and systems that governed life in society. It was the combination of these factors that led me finally, to the bewilderment of family and friends alike, to join the Preventive Medicine Residency in 2011.

And so, in a twist of fate, here I am sitting in an office in the Ministry of Health. The irony is that somehow I still got my wish- to help people, and perhaps, even save the world in a small way. God must have a sense of humor. In particular, I have been privileged to work on developing palliative care services, an area that I feel particularly passionate about after spending six months in the department of palliative medicine in Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

If Forrest Gump's immortal line sums up my life so far, I believe it also sums up public health. In today's complex world, public health is always evolving, and full of novel challenges. Traditional public health concepts are increasingly interacting with emerging fields like behavioural economics, social psychology, environmental and veterinary science, and geo-politics. This combination of uncertainty- and possibility- fascinates me.

But unlike Forrest Gump, my life outside of work is pretty ordinary. I enjoy playing the guitar, photography, reading, and sports. I am happily married, and my wife is also a Preventive Medicine Resident. We have a naughty but adorable pet rabbit who likes to boss us around (more than my superiors at MOH). Perhaps the most unusual thing to happen to me this year was to end up on a boat on the Ganges River- a public health physician's worst nightmare!

While the WHO still remains a distant dream, life at present is filled with more than enough challenges and excitement to keep me satisfied. No regrets!

*By Dr Winston Chin – R4 resident*



*My wife and I on a trip to Hong Kong*



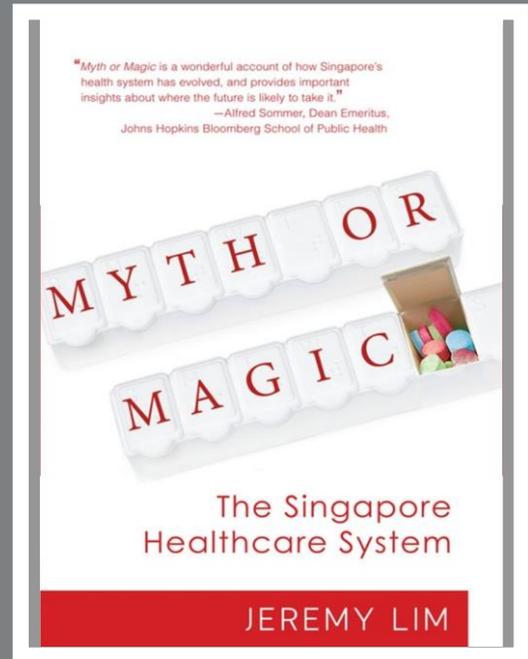
*The Preventive Medicine Residents on a recent study trip to Taiwan*

## Reflections on Writing 'Myth or Magic: The Singapore Healthcare System'

After 10 months of speaking to hundreds of people, reviewing almost 5 decades of government speeches and reports, and reflecting long and hard about the Singapore health system, 'Myth or Magic' was born. Why did I invest 10 months of my life for this?

Three reasons sum it up. Firstly, Singapore's story in healthcare is worth sharing. The low spending relative to sterling population health metrics is the envy of the world, our Medisave is the only national health savings account in the world, and in the course of one generation, Singapore shifted the share of healthcare financing from a predominantly government responsibility to one that is in large part privately held. These facts are the stuff of 'urban legend' and mythology and it is important to lay out the truth. Secondly, our system is on the cusp of major reform, probably the most fundamental since the introduction of Medisave 30 years ago. How can we ensure a process and outcome that aligns to societal beliefs and readies ourselves for a challenging future in which tough trade-offs is inevitable? Santayana writes that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. I hope this book serves as an important account of the story of Singapore's health system that is easy to read and understand so that many more persons in and out of the health system can contribute to our 'national conversation' about the future of our health system. Finally, I am unabashedly left of center in orientation and hope that the ideas and perspectives presented in the book will help influence the debate about future directions Singapore takes in healthcare. What I wrote in the book's dedication which was made to my children probably sums up my hopes for Singapore and the world- "The great American president, Franklin D Roosevelt once said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little. May your world be for all peoples, one with less 'struggling to cope' and more 'daring to hope', less 'me' and more 'we'.

By Dr Jeremy Lim



## Praise for 'Myth or Magic: The Singapore Health System'

**Dr. Lam Pin Min, MP and Chair Government Parliamentary Committee for Healthcare, Singapore-** *"This book offers a comprehensive insight into the philosophy and challenges of the Singapore healthcare system. Definitely a gem for healthcare policy makers, administrators, workers and researchers."*

**Prof. Alfred Sommer, Dean Emeritus, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health-** *"Myth or Magic is a wonderful account of how Singapore's health system has evolved, and provides important insights about where the future is likely to take it."*

**Dr. Wong Chiang Yin, President Singapore Medical Association (2006-2009)-** *"... a riveting read"*

**"THE SINGAPORE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM" BY DR JEREMY LIM**

Although the Hippocratic Oath is often acknowledged as the original code for professional ethical standards, it was Thomas Percival, an Englishman, who coined the term “medical ethics”.

Percival was born in 1740 a Cheshire farming family. Both his parents died when Thomas was young and he was left in the care of an elder sister. He studied medicine in Edinburgh University, where his interest in philosophy started.

Percival wrote the first code of professional ethics for doctors in response to a crisis at the hospital he co-founded and was working in, the Manchester Infirmary Fever Hospital. In 18th century England, the identification of the personal with the professional had caused professional disputes to become issues of gentlemanly honor. The staff dispute closed the Infirmary in the midst of an epidemic in 1792, and patients were turned away. The infirmary's trustees charged Percival to head a committee to draft a set of rules to govern practices and prevent such recurrences.

Two years later, Percival published *Medical Jurisprudence of a Code of Ethics and Institutes' Adapted to the Professions of Physic and Surgery*, and a revised book version, *Medical Ethics*, in 1803.

According to the book edited by RB Baker, Percival's writings were considered novel and radical. It separated the commonly-recognized personal gentlemen's honor from professional morality. He re-conceptualized medicine's moral mandate – the duty of caring for the sick – to be a collective group fiduciary duty (instead of an individual duty), with the source of obligation in the professional group's fiduciary duty to be patients, for “the ease, the health, and the lives of those committed to their charge”.

Percival also claimed that the moral authority of the medical profession should have primacy, and supersede both the individual duty of practitioners and the authority of lay institutional administrators.

Although the proposal for a code of medical ethics had a cold reception from the British medical association which rejected the concept of codifying professional conduct, the idea was warmly embraced across the Atlantic. The American Medical Association's first code of ethics in 1847 contained many writings of Percival *Medical Ethics*. Although AMA Code had undergone many revisions to adapt to changing times, the concepts and much of Percival's wordings still remain today.

*By Dr Toh Cheong Mui*

Ref:

1. RB Baker, AL Caplan, LL Emmanuel, SR Latham. *The American Medical Ethics Revolution: How the AMA's Code of Ethics has Transformed Physicians' Relationships to Patients, Professionals, and Society*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
2. Reynolds Historical Library. Percival, Thomas (1740 – 1804) (<http://www.uab.edu/reynolds/histfigs/percival>)
3. H MacDougall. *Medical Ethics: Past, Present and Future*. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada ([http://www.royalcollege.ca/portal/page/portal/rc/resources/bioethics/primers/medical\\_ethics#british](http://www.royalcollege.ca/portal/page/portal/rc/resources/bioethics/primers/medical_ethics#british))

## Fellows at The Line – Shangri-la Hotel

Fellows gathered at The Line – Shangri-la Hotel on the 29 November 2013 for a great time of food and networking amongst the Public Health and Occupational Physicians.

