

College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians Newsletter



CPHOP council of the 2014-2015

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President's Message

Dear Fellows of the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians,

I am pleased to share with you the decision of the Council of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS), to recognize the subspecialty of Aviation Medicine under the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians (CPHOP). The Specialists Accreditation Board (SAB) and Ministry of Health (MOH) have approved Aviation Medicine as a subspecialty under the specialties of Occupational Medicine, Internal Medicine and Family Medicine. The CPHOP Council looks forward to your support to approve the resolution to amend our College constitution to include Aviation Medicine in our College membership at next year's Annual General Meeting.

Aviation Medicine is a medical subspecialty which combines aspects of preventive, occupational, environmental and clinical medicine with the physiology and psychology of man in flight, and manages or prevents conditions to which pilots, cabin crews, passengers and others involved in flight are particularly susceptible, and applies medical knowledge to the human factors in aviation safety to prevent aviation related incidents and accidents. Let us warmly welcome Aviation Medicine Physicians joining our College as Fellows.

I am happy to report that we had an informative, enjoyable and success meeting at the 9th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine (PHOM) Conference in August 2014. On behalf of the College, I would like to register a note of thanks to Dr Angela Chow (Chairperson, Organising Committee), Dr Lim Wei Yen and Dr Sylvia Teo (Co-Chairs, Scientific Committee), Dr Lim John Wah (Vice Chairperson, Organising Committee) and all committee members for organising this conference.

I would like to share the discussions I had in my meetings with Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Bin Sulaiman, President of the College of Public Health Medicine, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, at the 48th Malaysia-Singapore Congress of Medicine held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Prof Fung Hong, President of the College of Community Medicine, Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, at the 9th Singapore PHOM Conference. We agree that the 3 sister Colleges should work closely together and collaborate in common areas of interest. We could work towards supporting each other's annual scientific conferences and maybe consider organising a tripartite conference once every 3 years and rotating between the 3 countries. We can explore collaboration to

President's Message Cont' ...



Dr Benjamin Ng, President of the College, giving the welcome address at the Fellows Lunch during the 9th PHOM Conference

organize focus group workshops in areas of current importance or interest, eg. pandemic or infectious disease prevention and outbreak management. We can consider publicizing interesting projects of Fellows from each College and helping to "match make" other Fellows interested to participate and convert these projects into multi-centre projects. We will need to continue the dialogue with our Malaysian and Hong Kong sister Colleges to work out the possible areas of collaborations.

In response to the request from Master of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore for feedback on the Residency Training, our College Fellows have provided valuable and candid assessments of the residency training system. The Academy has submitted the collated feedback to MOH for review and deliberation by its Residency Review Committee. The College Council looks forward to working with the Academy to strengthen our collaboration with MOH and other key stakeholders to achieve the common goal of training better specialists for tomorrow.

Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee on Specialist Training (JCST) has asked the Academy to nominate Fellows of the respective Colleges and Chapters to be members of the JCST Examination Committees. The specialty/subspecialty-specific JCST Examination Committee will be responsible for the design, development and implementation of all specialty/subspecialty-specific examinations (except ABMS-related examination). Each specialty or subspecialty will have one JCST Examination Committee. Our College has submitted our nominations for the Public Health and Occupational Medicine

JCST Examination Committees. The College looks forward to our Fellows' support and contribution to the training of future public health and occupational physicians.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Mona Toh for agreeing to lead the newly formed Editorial Team to further improve the contents and design of the College Newsletter. The Editorial Team looks forward to your support and contributions of articles, news and feedback to the College Newsletter.

Thank you
Dr Benjamin Ng Boon Lui
President (2014-2016)



College Extends Fellowship to Aviation Medicine Physicians

By Dr Gan Wee Hoe



Aviation Medicine is a specialized branch of medical science concerned with medical problems encountered in human flight in and beyond the atmosphere. It is a medical subspecialty which combines aspects of preventive, occupational, environmental and clinical medicine with the physiology and psychology of man in flight. It strives to treat or prevent conditions to which aircrews and others involved in flight are particularly susceptible, and applies medical knowledge to the human factors in aviation safety.

Medically significant aspects of aviation travel include exposure to changing atmospheric pressures, low ambient temperatures, large inertial forces, oxygen deprivation, and noise; air sickness; aircrew fatigue in long-haul flights, as well as the risk for spread of communicable disease. Specific situations encountered include recognizing an ear block in an infant traveling on an airliner with elevated aircraft cabin pressure altitude.

In 2014, the Specialists Accreditation Board and the Ministry of Health formally recognized Aviation Medicine as a medical subspecialty in Singapore. Routes to Aviation Medicine accreditation are through the disciplines of Occupational Medicine, Internal Medicine and Family Medicine. Following this milestone, the Academy of Medicine, Singapore Council granted approval for Aviation Medicine to be recognized under the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians. The College welcomes the inclusion of Aviation Medicine to the College fellowship, and will be inviting Aviation Medicine Physicians to join us as Fellows.

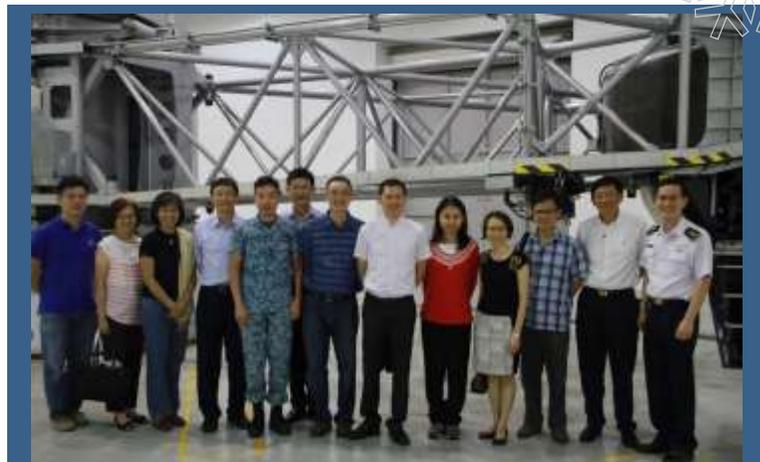


LTC (Dr) Brian See explaining the intricacies of Ejection Seat Training

Fellows Get-Together At The RSAF Aeromedical Centre

By Dr Brian See

Ahead of the anticipated joining of aviation medicine specialists as fellows of the College, fellows gathered at the Republic of Singapore Air Force's Aeromedical Centre on 14 November 2014 to learn more about aviation medicine, and to catch up over good food and great company. Co-hosted by the RSAF Medical Service's COL (Dr) Gan Wee Hoe and ST Healthcare's Dr Richard Tan, the evening started with a CME Talk entitled "Aviation Medicine - Historical Perspectives and its Practice in Singapore" by Dr Robin Low. This was followed by a tour that provided a glimpse into how aviation physiology training was conducted for high-performance aircraft pilots. During the walk through of the Centre's facilities, Fellow had the rare opportunity to get up close with the high-end equipment used to train military aircrew, such as the Human Training Centrifuge, the Spatial Disorientation Trainer, the Ejection Seat Trainer, the Hypobaric Chamber and the Night Vision Laboratory. As the night drew to a close, College President Dr Benjamin Ng thanked the hosts and said, "with the recent approval of Aviation Medicine as a sub-specialty by the Specialist Accreditation Board, the College will work towards inviting registered Aviation Medicine specialists to join our College as Fellows in 2015".



Group picture taken with the Human Training



Diving into a lavish buffet spread

9th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference

By Dr Angela Chow & Dr Lim John Wah



Prof Fung Hong, President of the Hong Kong College of Community Medicine

The 9th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference was held on 28 -29 August 2014. The theme of this year's conference "Embracing Challenges in Building Healthy Communities", built on last year's conference theme which focused on the challenges faced by the different population groups. The tracks were divided into 3 main broad categories viz. Health Systems, Communities and Environments. The conference was well attended by 280 participants, including participants from Australia and India.

There were two plenary lectures. The first day plenary lecture was delivered by Prof. Fung Hong, President of the Hong Kong College of Community Medicine, who was also the Academy of Medicine Singapore Visiting Academician. He shared on the topic: "Reforms in Health Services Delivery - Lessons from Hong Kong".

The second day plenary lecture "Occupational Health Protection – Too Little or Too Much?" was delivered by Prof. David Koh, Chair Professor of Occupational Health and Medicine, in the PAP Rashidah Sa'adatun Bolkiah Institute of Health Sciences, University of Brunei Darussalam.

There was also an engaging & enthusiastically well-received panel discussion on "Managing the Health and Safety of Migrant Workers". The Panels for the discussion comprised Dr Tan Lai Yong, Mr Kevin Teoh, Mr Lin Shilie and Mr Joshua Tan, with Prof. David Koh as the moderator.

Last but not least we had a lunch symposium which was sponsored by Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Research (CIDER), Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, where Dr Hsu Li Yang updated participants on "Antimicrobial Resistance – Singapore and Global Narratives".



Organizing Committee of the 9th PHOM 2014



Prof Benjamin Ong, Director of Medical Services (seated, 2nd from left) was the Guest-of-Honour



Dr Chew Pin Kee receiving the College Achievement Award 2014 from Prof Benjamin Ong



Prof Lee Hin Peng at the recent 9th PHOM Conference. He is also the first Achievement Award recipient.

Perspectives and Insights : 6 Questions for Prof Lee Hin Peng

Prof Lee is the Professor, Domain Leader (Health Systems & Behavioural Sciences) & Head (Chronic Diseases Programme), Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore

CPHOP : What is the biggest challenge facing Public Health & Occupational Physicians today?

LHP: The biggest challenge in my opinion is the unpredictability and complexity of 21st century problems and needs. In today's globalized world, the problems of PH [public health] take on many inter-related facets and effects. With widespread air travel, all countries are vulnerable to both emerging and re-emerging infections. The free flow of goods, services and information means that we are now subject to multiple influences and practices that lead also to the rise of chronic diseases. This [scenario] is occurring in a situation where the population is also rapidly ageing in Singapore, which makes things a lot more complicated. Everything seems to come to a head at the same time.

CPHOP : What was your most vivid memory of public health/ occupational medicine intervention in action & what was your response to it?

LHP: The most vivid and dramatic PH incident to date is our response to the SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] outbreak. After years of being lulled into complacency, thinking that we have more or less got infectious diseases under control, we were rudely awakened to the threat of a very serious and highly fatal disease. The need to go back to basics, doing shoe-leather epidemiology and to institute fundamental PH measures of isolation, quarantine and personal hygiene are object lessons in the abiding principles of good and effective PH practice. It was never a personal response but a great team effort in trying to identify the yet unknown agent in the early days [of the outbreak], to map out transmission patterns and to develop strategies for prevention and control.

In a personal capacity, I was Master of King Edward VII Hall at that time and was responsible for temperature monitoring of residents and the isolation of a few cases of students who had fever. There were many learning experiences which we all treasure even up to this day. That Singapore succeeded, together with other countries, in controlling SARS is testament to the continuing relevance of PH.

CPHOP : What, in your opinion, is the most important contribution to public health/ occupational medicine in Singapore, and why?

LHP: There are many important contributions, but one that is often forgotten is the initiation and development of the public housing programme in Singapore. The effective provision of good affordable housing with clean water supply, refuse and sewage disposal and improved living conditions for proper and hygienic handling of food preparation would constitute one of the single most important contributions to the uplifting of PH in our country, thereby taking Singapore into the first League of Nations.

CPHOP : If you had to change one thing in public health/ occupational medicine or its practice, what would it be?

LHP: If I had to change one thing, it would be to promote the idea that while we are ultimately responsible for our own health, it is quite in order, as well, for the "well-off" to help the "less-well-off", and the healthy to help the sick. Health need is often unpredictable and when it does happen, many individuals and families have difficulty coping even in the best of times. It is my view that some PH services like immunization and screening should not be considered matters of personal consumption but essential to promote general population health and thus reduce the need for unnecessary hospitalizations. They should be provided free-of-charge according to prescribed schedules and conditions, paid for by the nation for the long-term benefit of all.

Perspectives and Insights Cont' ...



CPHOP : What is the most important piece of advice to public health/ occupational medicine students or practitioners just starting out today?

LHP: We need a cadre of PH professionals who are well-grounded in key principles and skills, and innovative to look for new scientific knowledge that can be translated into effective programmes and solutions. To do this, we must have the passion for preventive work, the adaptability to think out-of-the-box, and the capacity to work as a team across many disciplines. We need to keep on learning and re-learning to keep abreast of advances in knowledge and thinking in the relevant fields.

CPHOP : What is the most rewarding aspect of being a Public Health/ Occupational Medicine practitioner?

LHP: As a PH professional, I am constantly reminded that we seldom see dramatic and sensational results. Our contributions to the health of the population require a long time to take effect, and often in quiet ways. Nobody talks about a disease that has been prevented. For example, although an active anti-smoking advocate in the early days, I had not seen results for at least 15 years. The incidence of lung cancer only began to decline in the late 1980s, much to our satisfaction. Today, it is no longer the No. 1 Cancer in Singapore, and this is the most reliable evidence that it pays to quit smoking individually and to reduce the habit in the community as much as possible (while also resulting in other health and economic benefits).



The Road Goes Ever On

By Dr Joseph Lim, Preventive Medicine Resident

It took me a long time to consider what to write about for this short article. I have always been amused by the SMA Hobbit's writings, but I lack his/her graceful aplomb and acerbic wit. In the end, I thought it would be apropos to reflect upon my journey in the residency so far, given that I am now completing my first senior residency posting – far from the beginning, and far from the end.

The beginning

I must admit that occupational medicine, or preventive medicine as a whole, was not what I set out to do during my medical school days. I received far more exposure to preventive medicine during my army days, which sparked my interest in the discipline, than during medical school, where the exposure was regrettably transient. Perhaps because what we do is radically different from more traditional clinical practice, exposure and interest in the field has always lagged behind. Even when it comes to public perception – anecdotally, I always had difficulty in explaining what we do to relatives and friends, some of whom had never heard of the specialty.

We represent a small proportion of medical professionals, despite the growing public and occupational health issues facing our world. Nevertheless, I have yet to regret my chosen path. After all, in which other medical discipline could I have learned about so many different aspects of healthcare and governance, and explored medical and societal concerns beyond the consult room? In the last couple of weeks alone, I have learnt about the work of a chef in a French restaurant, explored the work hazards of a graveyard digger, and visited a cat cafe to look for possible zoonotic disease transmission from animal to human staff.

The present

While my peers in other disciplines have (understandably) griped about the shift to the residency system and the ensuing havoc, I feel that our residency and training has, in particular, benefited. The hard work and dedication of our faculty members cannot be overstated, but I will not belabour the point. To me, the benefits of combining public and occupational health in one programme have never been better for training. From the occupational medicine viewpoint, there is an increasing need to be conversant with public and population health policies and issues, given the shift towards total workplace safety and health. Likewise for public health, awareness of work-related issues and concerns can only aid in improving governance of population health issues, given the increasing proportion of our lives which will be spent at work as the population ages.



The Road Goes Ever On Cont' ...

The future

Yet despite our training, what makes us useful? A statistician or epidemiologist can crunch and interpret data, a political science or public policy graduate can write policies, a clinician is better equipped to diagnose and treat patients. What then, our role? My short answer is that I believe our key benefit is in having training and experience in all these aspects, in being able to integrate multidisciplinary concerns in our work, and also to act as a bridge across these myriad sectors.

Public and occupational health physicians are well placed to coordinate advances in our fields, which often require the involvement of various disciplines, departments, and organisations. Many factors, such as population growth, the porosity of international boundaries, rapid dissemination of information, and accelerating technological and environmental changes contribute to a rapidly shifting population health landscape. We can, and should, provide the leadership needed to spearhead responses to both old and new issues.

Council's Get-Together with Residents – 29 October 2014

By Dr Clive Tan

The College organized a gathering with the residents and the faculty of the residency program on 29th October 2014, held in the hallowed halls of the Singapore Medical Association's Council Room. With food and drinks sponsored by our president, Dr Benjamin Ng, and Dr Wong Chiang Yin respectively, the seniors recounted their stories about decisions made and policies set, in a past era of marked by legends. With generous servings of local delights and great company, the stories lasted well into the night. For the younger ones who stayed til the end, it was indeed a great lesson in health policy, with personal stories and vignettes that are best shared behind closed doors.



From left to right (seated) : Dr Kenneth Choy, Dr Ho Sweet Far, Dr Clive Tan, Dr Jason Yap. Standing : Dr Steven Ooi



From left to right (seated) : Dr Andrew Tay, Dr Chew Ling, Dr Andrew Green. Standing : Dr Wong Mee Lian



From left to right: Dr Andrew Green, Dr Steven Ooi, Dr Benjamin Ng, Dr Mona Toh and Dr Andrew Tay



From left to right : Dr Wong Chiang Yin, Dr Vernon Lee, Dr Kenneth Choy and Dr Ho Sweet Far



From left to right : Dr Matthias Toh, Dr Wong Mee Lian, Dr Lim See Ming, Dr Hanley Ho and Dr Gan Wee Hoe

"The Road Goes Ever On"

*The Road goes ever on
and on
Down from the door
where it began.
Now far ahead the Road
has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger
way
Where many paths and
errands meet.
And whither then? I
cannot say.*

CPHOP Editorial Team

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Dr Mona Toh

Members

Dr Vernon Lee

Dr Clive Tan

Dr Brian See

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August 2015**

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Season's greetings!

The College wishes all Fellows a
Blessed Christmas 2014 and

Happy New Year 2015.

