

College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians

Newsletter Issue 6

June 2015

College Council

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Dr Vernon Lee
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Dr Brian See
Dr Clive Tan
Dr Vernon Lee

President's Message

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

In accordance with the By-Laws of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, three Council members, Dr Kenneth Choy, Dr Fereen Liew and Dr Mona Toh, stepped down for re-election at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 15 May 2015. Dr Choy and Dr Toh were duly re-elected, and with Dr Angela Chow who was newly elected, became the three new Council members at the AGM. The Council and I would like to thank Dr Fereen Liew for her support and contribution to the Council.

Following the AGM and in accordance with the By-Laws of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, Dr Vernon Lee was elected the President Elect of the College.

From January 2014 to April 2015, seven new Fellows were admitted to the Academy under the College. Of these seven new Fellows, one is a Public Health physician, three are Occupational Physicians and three are Aviation Medicine physicians. The College would like to take this opportunity to welcome all who have joined since January 2014; especially to our first three Aviation Medicine physician Fellows, Dr Wilfred Lim Wei Ming, Dr Benjamin Tan Boon Chuan and Dr Elton Tay.

The 10th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference will be held on 20-21 August this year at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel. With Singapore celebrating 50 years of independence, we will celebrate our progress in healthcare for the past 50 years and embrace challenges that we may face in the next 50 years. Thus, the theme for this year's conference is "The Health of a Nation: Celebrating our Past, Embracing the Future". On behalf of the College, I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Dr Audrey Tan and Dr Jeremiah Chng for leading the Organising Committee consisting of Dr Angela Chow (Treasurer), Dr Matthias Toh and Dr Jeff Hwang. I would also like to convey our appreciation to Dr Andre Wan and Dr Brian See (both are also in the Organising Committee) for guiding the Scientific Committee consisting of Dr Chew Ling, Dr Lee Meng Har, Dr Voo Yau Onn, Dr Sylvia Teo and Dr Tan Xin Quan. We look forward to meeting with you at the conference as it will also be an opportunity for networking and catching up with friends.

The Council looks forward to your continuing support and participations in the activities organised by the College. Thank you.

Dr Benjamin Ng
President (2014-2016)

2nd Annual General Meeting and Strategic Meeting

By Dr Vernon Lee

The College held its 2nd Annual General Meeting at the Raffles Town Club on 15 May 2015. The aim of the AGM was to review the College's programmes and budget for the past year, as well as develop the Mission, Vision and Values of the College.

The College performed several training-related activities over the past year for Public Health and Occupational Medicine specialists in Singapore. This included developing for the Specialists Accreditation Board, a proposed modular course on critical appraisal and research study methodology; nominating Fellows to the Joint Committee on Specialist Training; and supporting continuing medical education lectures and the residency program to nurture our future preventive medicine leaders. The College also developed the advanced specialty training programme for Bruneian doctors under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Academy and the Brunei Ministry of Health. Continued engagements are ongoing with the College of Public Health Medicine, Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, and the College of Community Medicine, Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, on possible areas of collaboration. In addition, Aviation Medicine was formally recognized as a subspecialty and its specialists were admitted to the College as Fellows.



Dr Jason Yap facilitating the discussion



College Fellows at the 2nd AGM and 1st Strategic Meeting

The AGM provided an excellent opportunity for Fellows from different fields, sectors and varying experiences to network over dinner, and to work together to develop the Mission, Vision and Values of the College. There were many views exchanged during the discussion, which displayed the strong interest that Fellows had in charting the future direction of the College. One of the major issues discussed was the engagement of non-specialist professionals to further develop the profession in Singapore.

The consensus on the Vision of the College, led by Dr Benjamin Ng and Dr Jason Yap, was that it should centre around a few themes:

- 1) Enhancing professionalism, including creating a competent community; being a reference point for, and an authority in, public health and occupational medicine; making a difference in our practice; promoting cohesiveness within our ranks; and being a role model for all public health and occupational medicine professionals.
- 2) Promoting and representing public health and occupational medicine views to the public, to policy makers, and to the world; and supporting research activities to address important questions.
- 3) Setting standards, including engaging in educational programmes, organizing professional events and supporting professional development, networking among fellow PHOM professionals and with others, and further developing the profession.

These concepts formed the basis for the Mission of the College, which the meeting, led by Dr Matthias Toh and Dr Vernon Lee, agreed should focus on being a respected professional body to gain recognition, to have internal and external validity, and to maintain high standards, with the ultimate objective of the advancing the health of populations.

Lastly, Dr Jason Yap led the fellows in an animated exercise to develop the Values of the College. The final four Values selected were Passion for Prevention, Integrity, Leadership, and Excellence.

Urban Health: Developing Locally, Leading Globally

By Dr Clive Tan

Currently based in WHO's Western Pacific Region Office, Dr Clive Tan provides consultancy and technical assistance to governments and public sector healthcare providers on hospital regulation, clinical services development, healthcare quality, and patient safety. Dr Tan sees opportunities for Singapore to play a bigger role in healthcare developments in the region.



Dr Clive Tan, as part of the WHO team, visiting a district hospital in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Mongolia has one of the highest rates of urban migration in recent years

The Rising Importance and Relevance of Urban Health

Urbanization and population ageing are two factors that are contributing to the rising importance and relevance of urban health. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2050, over 70% of the world's population will live in cities, with the most rapid growth expected in Asia and Africa.

Urban living presents populations with both challenges and opportunities. The health of urban populations is often tied to living conditions in cities. Urban living often means that physical activity and dietary patterns are heavily influenced by the environment, for better or for worse. Living in close proximity to one another means that communicable diseases can spread more quickly. Urban-living stressors and the paradoxical isolation in urban environments can increase risk of mental health disorders. Other health risks of urban living include air pollution, increased risk of road traffic accidents, and increased vulnerability from natural and man-made disasters.

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The urban health perspective provides new insights for improving population health and opportunities to involve sectors such as transport, education, housing, national parks and sporting associations to shape our living environment. Good urban health governance can help ensure that cities are planned and maintained so that facilities (e.g. swimming pools, cycling paths, activity centres for elderly) and services (e.g. social care centres, primary healthcare clinics) are accessible to all. Encouraging populations to adopt healthy behaviours in urban living and to participate in community-building efforts will contribute towards improvement in overall health of the community.

Local developments in Urban Health

In 2013, Singapore started the City for All Ages initiative that saw Marine Parade, Whampoa, Bedok and Taman Jurong making improvements to become more elder-friendly towns. These include infrastructure developments (e.g. void deck steps were levelled, fall alarms were installed for elderly living alone at home), enhancement to town environment (e.g. longer crossing duration for traffic light junctions), and improving access to social and health care services (e.g. visiting healthcare teams for elderly with impaired mobility). More townships have since signed up to join the City for All Ages initiative.

To address the health issue of ageing in urban environments, organizations such as Tsao Foundation's Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing, Touch Community Services and NTUC's Home Care Services have developed programmes to provide community-based medical and nursing services. Under the Regional Health Systems framework, these agencies collaborate with primary and tertiary care providers in their region to make health care more people-centred and integrated.

Locally, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) has created programmes to promote physical activity in the city (e.g. Sunrise in the City, Fitness at Work, Sundays @ the Park, Mall Aerobics). HPB also collaborated with the Centre for Liveable Cities, Urban Redevelopment Authority and participated in interagency infrastructure projects such as the Jurong Lake District, which will feature convenient healthcare facilities, ample jogging and cycling paths, and enhanced greenery features.

Global Leadership in Urban Health

Globally, Singapore's Health Promotion Board is a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, holds the Regional Vice-President Office for World Federation for Mental Health, and is a member of the Steering Committee for the Alliance For Health Cities since 2008.

A key development for Urban Health in Singapore is the launch of the "Health Living Master Plan" by HPB in 2014. It takes a holistic approach to Urban Health to make healthy living accessible, natural and effortless for all Singaporeans through its 3 prongs of Place (a conducive environment), People (a socially inclusive community) and Price (affordable options). Its Vision 2020 of Healthy Living Every Day includes addressing risk factors for non-communicable diseases, creating health-enabling living environments, improving health literacy and encouraging healthy life choices – both at work and at home.

In 2014, Singapore launched the Smart Nation initiative to harness the use of infocomm technology, networks and data to support better living and stronger communities. At its launch, Prime Minister Lee talked about the potential improvements in health, and highlighted features such as tele-medicine, sensor systems for elderly living alone, and integrated health records. These infrastructure developments, together with a supportive policy environment and Singapore's compact design make Singapore an ideal test-bed for urban IT-enabled health solutions.

With these developments in Urban Health at the national level, there will be many opportunities for research, programme evaluation and sharing at international conferences. Researchers and academics will need to expand their research toolbox to include non-quantitative approaches, such as qualitative methods, policy analysis, scenario planning and modelling. With communities of practice being formed at the regional and international level, the proactive sharing of Singapore's experience and knowledge will present new opportunities for us to be a global leader in Urban Health.

Dr Margaret Chan's Lecture on "Facing Public Health Challenges in the Post-2015 Era - The Need For A New Paradigm" – A Personal Reflection

By Dr Winston Chin

On 12 February, in celebration of the official opening of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) and distinguished NUS alumnus, delivered a keynote lecture entitled "Facing public health challenges in the post-2015 era – the need for a new paradigm". Dr Chan, in her usual humorous and engaging style, gave a broad sweep of the public health challenges facing WHO and the world in the 21st century. Topics covered ranged from the continuing threat of infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics, the challenges in moving toward the new Sustainable Development Goals post-2015, to the evolving nature of public health itself and the need for more inter-disciplinary collaboration. The world she painted was a complex one : a world more inter-connected than ever, and yet still disparate; full of wicked problems, like the rise of non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases to which there are no easy solutions. On a lighter note, she also found time to reminisce about her time in Singapore, when pursuing her Masters of Public Health at NUS, the famous Tiong Bahru "char siew bao", and her decades-long friendship with Dean Professor Chia Kee Seng.



Dr Winston Chin, one of the 3 young public health practitioners at the roundtable discussion with Dr Chan

Following the lecture, Dr Chan participated in a roundtable discussion with three young public health practitioners. She fielded a broad range of questions, ranging from the role of economics and marketing in public health, the global response to emerging infectious diseases, and the importance of public health leadership. She rallied all present to confront the challenges ahead with courage and verve.

Dr Chan's lecture and roundtable discussion have reminded me that the challenges facing public health practitioners in the 21st century are indeed complex and diverse, and very different from those of the past. For example, "lifestyle" factors play a major role in the rise of non-communicable diseases, and these cannot be divorced from the social environment and economic incentives that shape human behavior. The interconnectedness of the world means that infectious diseases have the potential to spread much more quickly than before, and the recent Ebola epidemic has reminded us of the importance of strengthening health systems on one hand, and the need for more innovative, responsive modes of disease surveillance and response on the other. Public health professionals in the 21st century, while drawing on the successes of the past, will definitely need to be more innovative and resourceful in meeting the challenges of the future.

Interview with Prof Goh Kee Tai

(insights & perspectives on public health & occupational medicine)

Senior Consultant, Office of the Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health



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

From my perspective of an infectious disease epidemiologist, emerging infectious diseases that can be transmitted from person to person by the respiratory route remains one of the biggest challenges. From my perspective of an infectious disease epidemiologist, emerging infectious diseases that can be transmitted from person to person by the respiratory route remains one of the biggest challenges in public health today. We have seen the far-reaching impacts of the SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] outbreak in 2003. It was a health security issue. We have to be very vigilant and well prepared to face the next emerging disease, in particular pandemic influenza. The recent emergence of a number of different strains of avian influenza (H5N1, H7N9), MERS-CoV and Ebola virus disease in the region and beyond reminds us of our vulnerability to the introduction into and spread of these diseases in our highly susceptible population in this well-connected densely populated global city state.

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

During my career, I participated in the formulation and evaluation of the national immunisation programmes. I was involved in several national serological surveys to assess the changing levels of herd immunity of the population against various vaccine-preventable diseases.

I have witnessed the successful implementation of the national childhood immunisation programmes. Many dreadful childhood diseases such as diphtheria, polio, neonatal tetanus and congenital rubella have since been eliminated. Hepatitis B virus infection in children has been brought under control with no acute cases reported in those below 15 years of age and the prevalence of hepatitis B carriers in the childhood population is also very low (0.3%).

Interview with Prof Goh Kee Tai (Cont'd)

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

We should acknowledge the contribution of environmental hygiene and sanitation to the reduction in morbidity and mortality of a number of environment-related infectious diseases. Food- and water-borne diseases like cholera and typhoid are no longer public health problems. For vector-borne diseases, the breeding habitats of malaria mosquitoes were eliminated through environmental engineering and vector control. Singapore was certified free from malaria by the World Health Organisation in 1982. Japanese encephalitis has virtually disappeared. On the other hand, the successful control of dengue mosquitoes has brought about a paradoxical situation where outbreaks of dengue tend to occur more frequently and with increasing intensity because of the low herd immunity of the population.

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

I would like our Preventive Medicine residents to be given the opportunity to be posted to the National Environment Agency to understand some of the environmental issues affecting health in the community.

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

To remember that a career in Preventive Medicine is a calling. At the end of the day, you will realise that serving for the good of the community rather than for personal gains is most rewarding. Be passionate and enjoy what you are doing. You contribute more by working with others in a team.

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

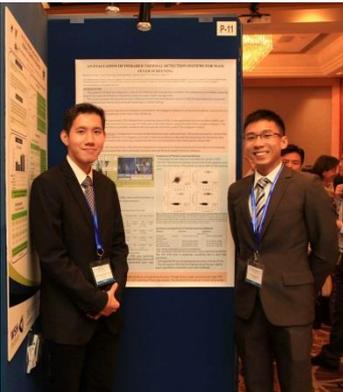
My reward is enjoying every area of my work. Epidemiology is my hobby; it is extremely interesting.

~~ End of Interview ~~

Resident's Column

By Dr Jeff Hwang – 3rd Year Preventive Medicine Resident

Photos courtesy of Dr Low Ying Liang, and colleagues from Biodefence Centre



Fellow officers presenting their project at the Singapore PHOM Conference 2014

In 2013, I was given the honour of writing an article for this newsletter to share the first two years of my residency experience. Since then, I re-enlisted in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to complete my National Service, and became operationally ready in December last year. It is a good time to reflect on my time in SAF now, as it has truly been a great experience. Through this article, I would like readers to understand public health and occupational medicine in the military setting, and how SAF can contribute to the training of a preventive medicine resident.

For my National Service, I worked in the Biodefence Centre, which is in charge of all preventive medicine issues in the SAF, ranging from infectious disease outbreaks and vaccination policies to dengue control and haze. As the Staff Officer for Occupational Health, I was responsible for occupational health issues on the SAF-wide level, including formulating of haze guidelines, and tracking of occupational diseases.

One of the best aspects during my time in Biodefence Centre is the diverse portfolio which each officer takes charge of. Besides occupational health work, I had opportunities to investigate gastroenteritis outbreaks, plan epidemiology projects, and even look after the occupational health issues of my unit. My secondary appointments, involving seeing recruits on-call and becoming a deputy Battalion Medicine Officer, helped maintain my clinical skills and see how policies can impact soldiers on an individual level. These job scopes have given me a great amount of exposure to different aspects of preventive medicine.

The SAF is also at the forefront of national public health issues such as haze, dengue and Ebola, as these issues have national defence implications. As such, I have always found the work done in Biodefence Centre to be very relevant, and we can make a difference to the health of our soldiers. This has also contributed to the strong support for all the officers in the Biodefence Centre from the SAF leadership, which has definitely helped us get our work done.

In Biodefence Centre, our work is often very fast-paced due to the issues that we handle. As such, the staff officers are given a lot of responsibilities, which required us to take initiatives and be independent in our work. I remember having to meet high-ranking SAF officials alone, and the initial experience was daunting. We learnt the importance of being certain of the scientific facts and confident in putting forward our ideas, which are invaluable skills as we often have to work with senior management in our field of work.



Staff officer performing field work



Biodefence Centre Department photo at the Singapore PHOM Conference 2014

While the work in Biodefence Centre may be busy, we always received tremendous support and guidance from our bosses, including the Head, Dr Vernon Lee, and we were trusted to perform our work well. My training was also regarded as a priority, and I was even asked not to skip any Preventive Medicine sessions. In addition, Dr Vernon placed a lot of emphasis on research, and all the officers had many opportunities to work on projects, publish papers and present at conferences.

What does this mean for a preventive medicine resident? For preventive medicine residents serving their National Service, I would strongly encourage them to apply for a rotation in Biodefence Centre. While currently there are no residents who have been rotated to Biodefence Centre outside of National Service, this is something that can be looked into. There are also many other departments doing preventive medicine work, such as in aviation and naval medicine, and residents should explore doing a rotation in these areas.

In conclusion, the SAF, and Biodefence Centre in particular, has given me a unique experience that is different from other training sites, and I am thankful to my colleagues and friends there who have made my time there a memorable one.

Chinese New Year 'Lo Hei' – 27 February 2015

The College celebrated Chinese New Year period early this year with a "Lo Hei" at the Imperial Treasure Cantonese Restaurant in Great World City. About 20 Fellows gathered together to socialize, network, and catch up with friends.



Tossing Yu-Sheng For Good Luck

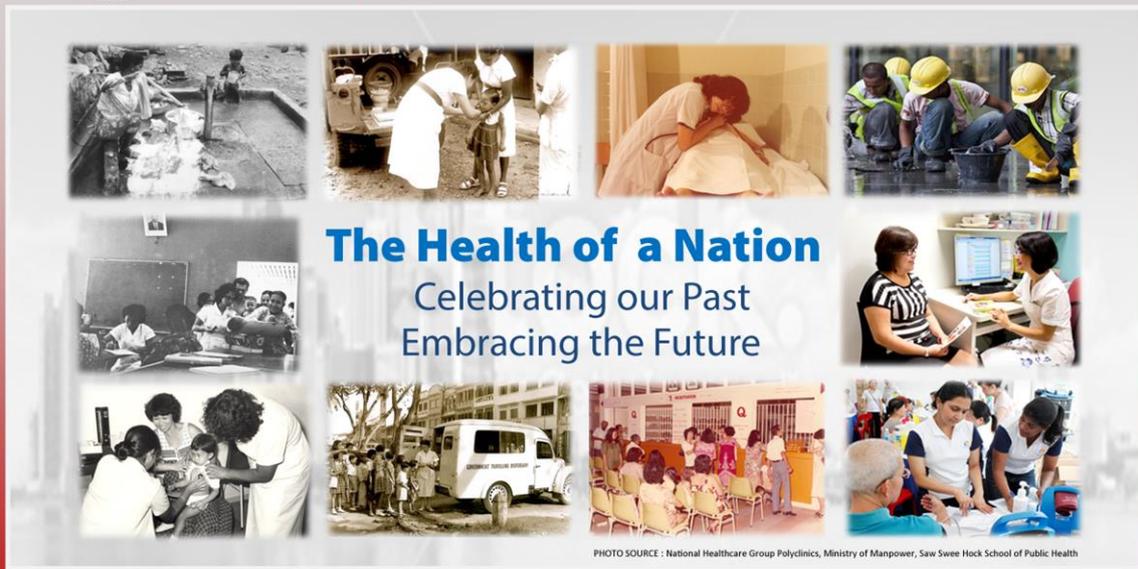


Catching Up With Old Friends - A Photo For The Album

10th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference



10th Singapore Public Health & Occupational Medicine Conference



20-21 August 2015 | Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel

Please refer to our website at www.phconference.org for more information, Scientific Programme Update and Faculty Profile. Kindly be informed that the early bird registration closing date have been **extended** to the **14 July 2015**. Do register early to benefit from the savings.



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