



College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians

Newsletter Issue 8

August 2016

President's message

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

It is with great honor and humility that I take on the role as President of the College following our AGM on 6 May 2016. I am here to serve the College, you the Fellows, and the public health, occupational medicine, and aviation medicine community. First and foremost, I wish to thank Dr Benjamin Ng for his invaluable contributions as President of the College from 2014 to 2016. His Presidency has seen the growth of the College both in number of members and also in partnership with local and foreign institutions. His vision and guidance has laid the solid foundation of our College for the future. I also wish to thank Dr Matthias Toh, our long time Council member and Treasurer, for his service as he steps down from the Council. I wish both of them all the best in their endeavors.

At the same time, I welcome our new Council members Dr Clive Tan, a public health specialist, and Dr Lim John Wah, an occupational medicine specialist, and our returning member Dr Jason Yap.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the ideas that we have brainstormed over the past few meetings with our Fellows, as well as to seek your support and participation as we bring our College into the future. The College's Vision, Mission and Values have now been finalized and will be placed on our website shortly. This has been the culmination of a year's work to encapsulate the essence of our College and what we believe in. The Vision, Mission and Values will be a guiding light for us and will shape our activities.

To achieve this, I aim to accomplish three areas of work in the coming years. These areas have been discussed at a few meetings, will be further developed by the new College Council, and will be shared with all Fellows for consultation.

The first area is in the strengthening of professional activities to increase the breadth and depth of such activities that are available to our Fellows. These could range from generic preventive medicine topics to specific interest areas. Our College will also look to strengthen partnerships with our fellow colleges in Malaysia, Hong Kong, UK, and Australia and beyond to promote sharing of academic and professional content. The College fund remains very healthy at more than \$260k, with year on year surpluses, mostly due to income from the annual conference.

COLLEGE COUNCIL

Dr Vernon Lee
President

Dr Benjamin Ng
Immediate Past President

Dr Jason Yap
Vice-President

Dr Lim John Wah
Honorary Secretary

Dr Clive Tan
Honorary Treasurer

Dr Angela Chow
Council Member

Dr Kenneth Choy
Council Member

Dr Mona Toh
Council Member

EDITORIAL TEAM

Dr Mona Toh
Editor

Dr Clive Tan
Deputy Editor

Dr Jason Yap
Member

President's message (Continued)



A/Prof Vernon Lee

While a healthy fund is necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the College, I would like to utilize some of the annual surpluses to further our mission for the benefit of our Fellows and of our profession. We have a travel grant to support Fellows for overseas conferences or visits. This has unfortunately not been well utilized in the past years. This year, we will look for fresh ideas to expand our professional activities, including overseas study trips, and to also include social and networking events to bring our Fellows closer together.

The second area is to increase the stature and awareness of our College through greater advocacy for topics of interest. Our College is an important platform to provide professional opinion and commentary to supplement the official stance of our policy-making bodies, and to educate the community on key preventive medicine issues. I see this as an important partnership with policy makers and the public, and will enable the College to gain prominence as the body of experts both for decision makers to engage with for technical support, and also for the general population to look up to for professional advice. The College has written an opinion piece on diabetes with the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, which can be found at <http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-value-of-prevention-in-the-war-on-diabetes>

(reproduced on Page 3 of this issue), and will aim to publish more of such pieces and to engage in other advocacy activities.

Third, I hope that we will be able to engage the boarder public health, occupational medicine, and aviation medicine community, especially those who do not qualify to become Fellows of our College. Many of these individuals work closely with us and make significant contributions to the field of preventive medicine. It will therefore be important to include them in our community of practice as we work to strengthen our collective profession. Some ideas have previously been floated that will require further discussion, and I hope to work with you to develop a sustainable approach to embrace the wider community.

Please feel free to provide any ideas to any of the College Council members, and let us know if you would like to be more involved in various aspects of the College.

Finally, back to the topic of networking, our college will be jointly organizing, together with the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, the 2nd Singapore International Public Health Conference and 11th Singapore Public Health & Occupational Medicine Conference from 29 to 30 September 2016. The theme for this year's conference is "Contemporary Challenges, Sustainable Solutions", and will address three current public health challenges prevalent in Asia, (1) emerging infections, including antimicrobial resistance; (2) the intricacies of health systems and the implications on healthcare costs as a result of population ageing; and (3) the complexities of inequality and vulnerability of migrant and refugee populations, and their implications on public health. The conference will provide Fellows with a platform to share our insights on a variety of issues pertaining to the conference theme, and also in other areas of workplace health and safety, and aviation medicine. We hope to see you at this event, as it is the highlight of the year with more than 500 participants anticipated, and it will be a great opportunity to network with our Fellows and other public health, occupational medicine, and aviation medicine colleagues.

Thank you and looking forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,
A/Prof Vernon Lee
President (2016-2018)

The Value Of Prevention In The War On Diabetes

By Prof Chia Kee Seng & Dr Benjamin Ng

Prof Chia Kee Seng is the Dean and Professor of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore

Dr Benjamin Ng is the Immediate Past President of the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians at the Academy of Medicine, Singapore

This article was first published in The Straits Times on 23 April 2016. Reproduced with permission from the authors.

Minister for Health Gan Kim Yong recently declared war on diabetes in Singapore.

This clarion call for government agencies, the private sector and the rest of the community to go all out to fight the disease is timely and much needed. It also underscores the Government's intent to invest immense resources in new initiatives and programmes to fight the disease.

But why is it necessary to single out diabetes and take such bold, multi-sectoral action against a single disease?

When we consider the current and projected number of diabetics, the severity of diabetes-related complications and the enormous costs to both the individual and country, the rationale becomes clear and self-evident.

Singapore is home to more than 400,000 diabetics today. Estimates suggest that diabetes will affect almost 670,000 people in 2030, and an alarming one million by 2050 if we do not act now to arrest this trend. This increase is not merely due to an ageing population. It is also caused by the rapid rise in the proportion of overweight and obese young adults. In addition, today, there are about 10,000 patients who are suffering from the complications of diabetes. That is expected to increase to at least 25,000 by 2050.

Diabetes, with its complications, exerts a staggering toll on the country with increased healthcare expenditure, loss of productivity and the psycho-social burden on society. A recent study by the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health and University of Southern California estimated that in 2010, diabetes among the working population cost Singapore more than \$1 billion, and that figure is likely to exceed \$2.5 billion by 2050.

As with any warfare, a well-planned strategy is crucial. Mr Gan identified five fronts on which this war would be fought: prevention, screening, control, education and stakeholders' engagement. What is particularly refreshing about this war plan is the major shift towards preventing the onset of diabetes and engaging every stakeholder.

In the past, the emphasis was on the treatment of diabetics: treatment protocols, right siting of patients and the stratification of patients according to risk of complications. There is strong evidence that good control of blood sugar can reduce the risk of and delay the onset of complications, including renal failure, heart attacks, stroke, blindness and lower limb amputations. However, the risk of

complications is increased even among pre-diabetics, whose blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a clinical diagnosis of diabetes. Moreover, many diabetics are unaware of their disease. By the time diabetics enter the healthcare system, they are already at higher risk of developing the dreaded complications.



Many of Singapore's upcoming national-level developments promote an increase in physical activity as part of daily living. They include having homes within 400m of a park, the opening of reservoir areas and waterways for recreational activities, going "car-lite" and providing cycling paths.

Prevention is based on targeting two important risk factors: unhealthy diet and inadequate exercise. Proper diet and regular exercise play integral roles in reducing or halting the trend of rising obesity. This is not easy, and we cannot be doing more of the same: telling and urging individuals to live healthily through the mass media, campaigns and mass activities that do not lead to sustainable behavioural change.

Behavioural research has highlighted the importance of macro-level environmental measures that create "healthy living as a default" or simply, making it easier for an individual to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Fortunately, many of our upcoming national-level developments promote the increase in physical activity as part of daily living. For instance, the plan to have 85 per cent of residents live within 400m of a park, opening up 900ha of reservoir area and 100km of waterways for recreational activities, going "car-lite" and providing 700km of cycling paths to turn this into a "walking and cycling" city.

A bigger challenge is diet. Eating is the national pastime. Singaporeans are conditioned, from a young age, to eat certain types and amounts of food. Many overeat and eat unhealthily. A high proportion of young adults (aged 18 to 29 years) prefer food items such as sodas, fruit juices and refined carbohydrates, all of which increase the risks of obesity and diabetes.

Many advocate a sugar tax, citing the success of the tobacco tax. However, sugar and tobacco are rather different commodities. Taxation is generally a blunt instrument. A tobacco tax is very specific and easier to administer. It is difficult to administer a sugar tax unless it is restricted to specific items like sodas. Instead of imposing a sugar tax, efforts could be made to engage the food and beverage industry more actively and recruit it as an ally that offers healthier product offerings, advertises responsibly and encourages healthy eating.

Environmental changes at the macro level must also sync with behavioural changes at the individual level. Individuals must be empowered to make the right choices at the point of decision. This is a highly complex area that still requires much research, especially from the sociological and behavioural perspectives. However, there are a few obvious touchpoints, with the first being a broad-based health education targeting the young and the elderly, which takes into account how both target groups acquire information and form mindsets. The goal is not for

people to increase knowledge but to change attitudes.

The second obvious touch point is to promote behavioural change in the workplace. With employees spending up to one-third of the day at work, the workplace offers a conducive environment to foster healthier eating habits and lifestyle. There are overseas examples of workplace-centred diabetes prevention and management programmes. Locally, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Manpower launched the Total Workplace Safety and Health to help employers and employees go beyond a workplace safety culture to a safety and health-promoting culture.

Finally, it is very refreshing that the war is moving beyond hospitals and healthcare to providing good health - that means nurturing a healthy nation and people. This paradigm shift will require healthcare workers to move out of their treatment- and patient-centric comfort zone to a new approach of being prevention- and population-centric. The six regional health systems will have to be transformed to being six operators of a single national health system. This war on diabetes is a great opportunity to further transform the regional health systems.

War has been declared. We have the armaments. We need to assemble the troops. It will be a long war but Singapore will succeed. We will not have one million diabetics, come 2050.

Insights & Perspectives Interview with Dr Chen Ai Ju

Recipient of College of Public Health & Occupational Physicians Achievement Award 2015

Dr Chen Ai Ju

Dr Chen's association with public health began by chance she was approached by the then Professor in the Dept. of Social Medicine and Public Health to join the Department. She enrolled in the Diploma in Public Health course at the University of Liverpool in 1969 when accompanying her husband for his medical Fellowship in UK. Upon return to Singapore, Dr Chen joined the Public Health Division of MOH and later headed a new Research and Statistics Department in MOH (HQ). In 1985, Dr Chen became DDMS (Primary Health) and subsequently DDMS (Hospital) in 1992. She was promoted to Director of Medical Services (DMS) in 1996, a post she held until 2000. During her stint as DMS, Dr Chen oversaw the implementation of the Private Hospital and Medical Clinics Act, the revision of the Medical Registration Act and the promulgation of the Specialist Register, in addition to strengthening the Healthy Lifestyle programme, especially in the area of smoking control.



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

CAJ: As the health needs of the population changes with social and economic development in Singapore, we must be nimble and our programmes must adapt to meet the present and future needs of the country. There are 3 major challenges.

(i) We need to strengthen the surveillance, epidemiology and control of chronic non-communicable diseases. However, our traditional healthy lifestyle programme will be insufficient to tackle these diseases. We need to develop new and innovative strategies encompassing early detection through focussed

health screening, and to improve clinical management and health promotion facilitated through environmental changes.

(ii) We will need to work closely with international health organisations, other governmental and non-governmental organisations to control communicable diseases including emerging infectious diseases.

(iii) Lastly, as Singapore is aging rapidly, public health will play a major role in ensuring that health care for the elderly is focussed on helping them to remain healthy and active in the community through preventive and health promotion and in ensuring the health services provided are appropriate and cost effective.

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

CAJ: As the country rapidly urbanised and developed in the 70s and 80s, a new threat to public health then emerged in Singapore - a marked increase in the prevalence of cardiovascular diseases and cancers.- which called for new public health measures to be implemented. Intensive anti-smoking and healthy lifestyle programmes were quickly launched and these contributed significantly to the fall in age-standardised morbidity and mortality rates of chronic degenerative diseases seen since the 1990s.



Dr Chen Ai Ju receiving the College's 2015 Achievement Award during the 10th PHOM conference from Guest-of-Honour, Minister of State (Health), Dr Lam Pin Min

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

CAJ: Public health can take pride in being a major contributor through its health promotion component in helping Singaporeans to be more fit and healthy, and towards the development of the country. Our national programmes have a mass effect, achieved through improvement in environmental health, comprehensive immunization programme, early detection with cost effective screening measures, and healthy lifestyle health education and promotion activities.

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

CAJ: Public health is a hands-on and inter-disciplinary subject. We as public health specialists cannot afford to live in an ivory tower by ourselves, and risk being ignored. We have to understand and work with society at large and with the government of the day. We also need to work with medical specialists and the many experts in various fields so that they will appreciate the value and relevance of public health as this will indirectly help us achieve our goal.

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

CAJ: Health problems are universal and one could learn from the experiences of other countries whether developing or developed, whether through reading widely and/ or overseas study visits. The important thing is to be able to adapt what other's experience to our own local situation. For example, we need to empower people and other organisations with the necessary information and opportunities through use of newer modalities of information technology so that they will cooperate with us.




Dr Chen Ai Ju giving a one of the speeches during the College's 2015 Achievement Award during the 10th PHOM conference.

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

CAJ: It is most rewarding when you see that the outcome of the programme you have initiated, planned and implemented benefiting a large segment of the population. This can be seen most dramatically in the control of vaccine-preventive diseases, e.g. through the inclusion of measles, mumps and rubella immunization into the childhood immunisation programme. The hepatitis B immunization and screening of blood supply have managed to reduce hepatitis B virus infection in the community.

2nd SIPHC & 11th PHOM Conference



2nd Singapore International Public Health Conference 11th Singapore Public Health & Occupational Medicine Conference

Contemporary Challenges, Sustainable Solutions

Register Now!




29-30 September 2016
28 September 2016 (Pre-conference Workshops)




Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel
Singapore

Plenary Speakers




Dr Richard Horton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
The Lancet




Prof Richard Coker
HEAD
Communicable Diseases Policy Research Group
London School of Hygiene and
Tropical Medicine



Prof Sarah Harper
DIRECTOR
Professor of Gerontology
and Senior Research
Fellow Nuffield College



Prof David Stuckler
PROFESSOR
Political Economy and Sociology
Oxford University



Prof Jacob (Jaap) C. Seidell
PROFESSOR NUTRITION AND
HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH SCIENCES
VU University Amsterdam

Conference Registration Fees

All rates inclusive of 7% Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Category	Early Bird Rate (Ends 30 June 2016)	Regular Rate (Starts 1 July 2016)
Fellows and Members, Academy of Medicine, Singapore (FAMS) Preventive Medicine Residents	\$S600.00	\$S700.00
Non-FAMS	\$S720.00	\$S820.00
Day Registration	\$S460.00	\$S510.00
Full Time Students	\$S450.00	
FAMS 65 years old & above	\$S450.00	
Low to Low-middle income countries and NGOs/VWOs*	\$S500.00	

Pre-Conference Workshop Registration Fees

All rates inclusive of 7% Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Category	Rate
Biostatistics Using R	\$S300.00
Health Technology Assessment: Its Value in Developing and Evaluating Technologies and Policies	\$S500.00
Traditional and Behavioural Economics in Public Health	\$S500.00



For more information about the conference, please visit <http://www.phconference.org>

Topics Covered

- Public Health Challenges in Asia
- Infectious Diseases
- Ageing + Chronic Diseases
- Health Services Research / Health Economics Research
- Emerging OSH Issues and the OM Physician
- Healthcare Analytics, Big Data in Health, Predictive Analytics
- Mental Well-being / Health
- Fitness & Return to Work (Healthy Workplaces)

- Technology-Assisted Health Communications and Promotion
- Sexual Health (Promotion, Communications)
- Prevention of Obesity, Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome (Communications, Promotion, Occupational Medicine)
- Child, Maternal, Adolescent Health
- Public Health Eye Research
- Aviation and Underwater Medicine
- Nutrition in Public Health
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Organised By

Saw Swee Hoek
School of Public Health

Copyright © 2nd Singapore International Public Health Conference and 11th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference 2016

Please refer to our website at www.phconference.org for more information, Scientific Programme Update and Faculty Profile.

Chinese New Year 'Lo Hei'

12th February 2016



The College celebrated Chinese New Year period early this year with a "Lo Hei" at The Chinese Restaurant in Raffles Town Club . About 20 Fellows gathered together to socialize, network, and catch up with friends.

3rd Annual General Meeting

6th May 2016



Fellows attended the 3rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 6th May 2016, followed by dinner at Alumni Medical Centre. Introducing our new President, Dr Vernon Lee.



College of Public Health and Occupational Physician

Academy of Medicine Singapore
81 Kim Keat Road
Level 11 & 12, NKF Centre
Phone: 6593 7808
Fax: 6593 7880
E-mail: phom@ams.edu.sg