



College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians

Newsletter Issue 16

January 2020

President's message



Vernon Lee

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

Hope you're having a happy and healthy festive season. This year has been a successful one for both the Academy and our College.

Our 14th Singapore PHOM Conference was a success, with 375 people in attendance. There were several panel discussions on "Challenges of Early-Onset Cognitive Impairment in Work Ability", "Healthcare Financing: Different Paths to Universal Healthcare" and "Electronic Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Reduced Harm Products" that had active participation from the panelists and audiences alike. At this year's Conference, we

also awarded A/Prof Wong Mee Lian with the College's Lifetime Achievement Award for her work in public health in Singapore. Congratulations Mee Lian for this achievement!

As a continuation of our efforts to provide opportunities for fellowship and continuing education, we have organized several events in this year. The inaugural study visit to Hong Kong saw the participation of 21 fellows and was a resounding success, fostering closer ties with our colleagues in Hong Kong, and among the Fellows. Due to the positive feedback, we will be organising another study trip to Taiwan in February 2020. The annual Fellows' lunch at the PHOM conference saw 41 Fellows participating. We also organized 2 other events, a CME talk on "The internal tobacco industry documents" and the Year End Get-Together, which were well attended by Fellows, Preventive Medicine residents, and interested external parties.

For the coming year, we will be planning a variety of activities, including professional and social activities to enable Fellows to come together to exchange ideas and expand professional networks.

Thank you for your continued support of the College and the College Council, and on behalf of the Council I wish all of you a Happy New Year.

Yours sincerely,
Vernon Lee
President (2016-2020)

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14th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference: Preventive Health in a Changing World

By Sarah Yong

Sarah Yong is a Preventive Medicine resident who was a member of the Scientific Committee for the 14th PHOM conference.

The 14th PHOM conference was held at Equarius Hotel on Sentosa Island. The conference ran from 15 to 16 Oct 2019, with pre-conference workshops held on 14 Oct.



Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Guest-of-Honor, Mr Chan Heng Kee delivering the Opening Address at the Opening Ceremony of the 14th PHOM Conference.

This year's conference theme was "Preventive Health in a Changing World", and explored the impact that rapid socio-economic, demographic and technological changes have on population health.



At the Opening Ceremony of the 14th PHOM Conference: [from left] Dr Kyle Tan Xin Quan, Dr S R E Sayampanathan, Mr Paul Lim (husband of A/Prof Wong Mee Lian), A/Prof Wong Mee Lian, Dr S R E Sayampanathan, PS Chan Heng Kee, Dr Vernon Lee, and Dr Clive Tan.

The conference brought together more than 375 delegates from Singapore and the Asia Pacific region, with participants from a range of backgrounds including academics, practitioners, policy-makers, clinicians and students.



Professor Vivian Lim delivering the keynote lecture on a "Sustainable Health System in the 21st Century".

Professor Vivian Lin, Executive Dean and Professor of Practice (Public Health) at the University of Hong Kong, and former Director of Health Systems at Western Pacific Region Office of the World Health Organisation delivered the keynote lecture on a "Sustainable Health System, in the 21st Century". She shared insights on the multiple meanings of "sustainability", as well as the need to move beyond health services to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She highlighted the central role of universal health coverage in achieving the SDGs and discussed how a multi-sectoral and whole of society approach is increasingly required in an interrelated, interconnected and indivisible world.



Dr Kyle Tan Xin Quan, Organising Chair of the 14th PHOM Conference presenting an appreciation token to Professor Vivian Lim who delivered the keynote lecture.

14th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference: Preventive Health in a Changing World (Cont'd)

The panel discussion on “Mind over Matter: Challenges of Early-Onset Cognitive Impairment in Work Ability” brought together experts who provided cross-disciplinary perspectives on enabling persons with cognitive impairment to meaningfully participate in work. I found Ms Dian Karnina’s sharing on Apex Harmony Lodge’s Therapy Through Work For People With Young Onset & Early Stage Dementia (TTW YES) programme particularly refreshing in how it approached persons with dementia – to assume they can do everything until proven otherwise. Often in healthcare we tend to operate from a deficit model which, while useful in framing problems, can sometimes lead us to ignore an individual’s personhood and dignity.

In view of the overwhelming response to last year’s breakout session on health insurance, this year’s conference featured a panel discussion on healthcare financing and how to achieve universal healthcare. Several pertinent issues were discussed, including the challenges in striking the right balance between coverage and waste, and how to define and measure outcomes.



The plenary panel on the “Electronic Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Reduced Harm Products: Godsend or the Devil’s Work?”

A key highlight of the conference was the plenary discussion on electronic cigarettes and other tobacco reduced harm products. The discussion on this controversial topic was lively and engaging, and highlighted the complexities in public health decision making. Although there was no consensus among the panellists, it drove home the point that rather than simply being “godsend” or “the devil’s work”, electronic cigarettes were, to quote panellist Prof Chia Kee Seng, perhaps best characterised as a “human-made” issue.

The breakout sessions were well-attended and covered a diverse range of interesting topics that were particularly relevant amidst a fast-moving global context. This included innovations in promoting health, developments in workplace safety and health, and insights on nutrition and sexually transmitted infections from the latest epidemiological research.



One of the breakout sessions: Sexually-Transmitted Diseases: Old Wine in New Bottles

On a personal note, the moment that probably left the deepest impression was the citation delivered when A/Prof Wong Mee Lian received the CPHOP Lifetime Achievement Award. In Preventive Medicine, the path of least resistance is often to pursue whatever is in vogue at that particular point in time. This was not what A/Prof Wong did. Instead, she chose to devote her efforts for the benefit of marginalised and vulnerable women. While this is not to say that we should all choose the “unpopular” path, it would be fair to say that A/Prof Wong’s example is a testament and a reminder to us who come after that true Public Health service comes from a place of conviction that our work should have a purpose greater than ourselves.

Overall, the 14th PHOM conference was thought-provoking and showed that successfully doing “Preventive Health in a Changing World” requires going beyond traditional silos and collaborating with multiple sectors. While not understating the challenges ahead, the conference provided inspiration and ideas as to how we can continue to advance the health of individuals and populations even in the midst of uncertainty.

Citation for A/Prof Wong Mee Lian

Recipient of College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians Achievement Award 2019

By Clive Tan

Good morning to our Guest of Honor, Mr Chan Heng Kee, Permanent Secretary of Health

Dr SRE Sayampanathan, Master, Academy of Medicine

Associate Professor Dr Vernon Lee, President of the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am deeply honoured to be the citation reader for this year's Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Associate Professor Wong Mee Lian.

Those who know Prof Wong would know of her life work in prevention of sexually transmitted infections in sex workers – an area where she dedicated more than 20 years of her life – to improve the safety of the working conditions of “sex workers” in Singapore.

If the term “sex worker” makes you uncomfortable, you are not alone. Most people would cringe at the term – not knowing whether it is legal or not; most people would shun them, avoid them, perhaps even condemn them – but Prof Wong, she is made from a different material driven by a strong sense of justice, a passion to help the marginalised, and a drive to give a voice to the voiceless – she had spent countless weeks, months, years in the red light districts of Singapore, making a difference to this invisible population.

Today, in year 2019, I would say we can speak of sex work with more openness and perhaps even accept the truth that it is the “oldest profession in the world”. But in the 1990s when Prof Wong started work in this area, it was a very different time – much more conservative. In that era, sexually transmitted disease was a big problem. It was estimated that at that time in Singapore, one in two brothel-based sex workers had been infected annually with a STI. If you can recall, this was also the time where HIV was a growing concern globally – Freddie Mercury, lead singer of Queen – died in 1991 from AIDS. STI was a huge problem and there was a social stigma surrounding people who contracted STIs, and not surprisingly an even bigger stigma on sex workers. Then came along Prof Wong – who wanted to tackle this public health issue in her own unique ground-up way – but there were no funds! Then, nobody would fund this kind of research– but Prof Wong, she never gave up.

She was passionate about this public health problem, and wanted to help the sex workers be able to protect themselves and reduce the spread of STIs in the community. She is able to see past the social stigma of the occupation – and break it down into its essentials: these sex workers – if they had a choice, they would earn



A/Prof Wong Mee Lian (left) receiving the CPHOP 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award from Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Guest-of-Honor, Mr Chan Heng Kee (right)

their money in other ways – but they had tough life situations; they had to make difficult choices, and personal sacrifices to earn money to raise their families. Prof Wong went in to help, with the purest of intentions – there was no fame and glory in this. It was difficult then for Prof Wong to get funds for research in this area. Eventually Prof Wong found a grant call from the NGO, “Action for AIDS”, and this kick-started her research in STI prevention. The success and health impact of that research paved the way for subsequent NMRC funds for her research.

One of the very first projects she did, involved a survey of 800+ brothel-based sex workers – where she learnt that many of them did not use condoms regularly. It was a very big problem – these sex workers didn't know how and were afraid to say no to their customers. These were very vulnerable populations, with no voice at the society level. However through the survey, Prof Wong found that there were about 20 plus sex workers who could consistently get their clients to use condoms. So she was able to get these “experts” to share their practical tips and best practices with the others, to help one another work more safely. To Prof Wong, she said she learnt a lot from these sex workers, humbly stating that they were the experts and that she was merely “facilitating”.

But to the sex workers, what they saw was this academic professor seated high up, from the University, who came down to their level – the brothels, to sit with them, understand their problems, improve their work conditions, and gave the community, this marginalised population, a voice. Prof Wong spoke up for the voiceless, and stood up for the marginalised.

Citation for A/Prof Wong Mee Lian

Recipient of College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians Achievement Award 2019

By Clive Tan

Fortunately this good work with the team at DSC Clinic didn't go unnoticed. At that time in the late 1990s, STI prevention was a huge regional public health issue – given the HIV epidemic and the huge social stigma. Prof Wong's excellent research and impactful work on promoting the use of condoms and prevention of STIs amongst sex workers in Singapore, was internationally recognised – Prof Wong and her team of researchers were awarded the prestigious Wilf Howe Memorial Prize by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine, Royal College of Physicians, London in 2008. Her work on STI prevention had been widely cited and used in STI prevention programme development in countries like India, China, United Kingdom, Cambodia, and Canada.



Dr Clive Tan delivering the citation

Later on in her career, Prof Wong again found herself working on another public health issue that was “under the radar” – Breast cancer screening in minority ethnic groups. In the past two decades, breast screening rates for Malay women remained low. A few years ago, Associate Professor Mikael Hartman, leader of the Breast Cancer programme at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, discussed with Prof Wong, the problem of low rates of breast cancer screening among Malay women in Singapore. Again – she found it difficult to get research funds to do this somewhat “less impactful” type of research. Well why it was “less impactful”? – one might ask. Because when you do research and intervention programmes on minority populations, even when you have a 50% improvement, the absolute number of people benefiting from it is still small, by comparison. The lack of ring-fenced research funds for these minority groups is a challenge for researchers. But even with the difficulty in securing funding, Prof Wong didn't give up trying. In the end, it was two surgeons from NUH – Prof CN Lee and Prof Mikael Hartman who helped raised \$100,000 to help Prof Wong kick-off her research in this area. Her mixed methods research helped uncover reasons why Malay women did not want to go for breast cancer screening; it revealed that there was a strong cultural element to this behaviour. She

then spoke to religious leaders and teachers at MUIS about her findings, and they were very keen to collaborate with her and her research team to help improve the breast cancer screening rates for the local Malay women population.

MUIS said, “Thank you, this is the first time someone has approached us to work with us on this screening problem on this scale”. And again Prof Wong humbly said, “I learnt so much from them; they have taught me so much. These religious authorities and teachers from MUIS and the Malay women – they are the experts; I'm just facilitating...”

I could stop here, but it would be incomplete if I do not briefly cover two other important aspects – Prof Wong as a teacher and mentor, and Prof Wong as a person – what shaped her to become the person she is now.

For close to 30 years in NUS, she has taught numerous students – from medical school, MPH candidates, preventive medicine residents, mentored Masters and PhD candidates. Her students have only good things to say about her – if I were to summarise it, “always patient, nurturing and motherly, and full of love”.

She shared with me: “Whenever you become a teacher, you must teach your students so well, that they become better than you” – this was not said by Prof Wong – she shared that this was said by her late father, who was a school teacher. I believe Prof Wong had memorised this saying, and it allows us to have a brief glimpse of how she came to become such an inspirational teacher and mentor.

Why is she so good at what she does – how did she grow up, how was it like for her in her formative years?

If you think that life had been easy for her – it has not. She came from a humble family background, her father was a teacher, and her mother was a very gentle woman who took care of her and her 5 siblings at home. She was schooled in Malaysia, studied Medicine on a Malaysian Federal Government scholarship, worked at the Ministry of Health and then at the University of Malaya. Her first projects in Public Health were highly ethnographical in nature – working on improving Maternal and Child Health for village women in the Longhouse community in Sarawak. She lived amongst these women for weeks (this was in the 1980s) – followed them to the padi fields, travelled to these areas by boat, lived amongst them to observe their culture – to firstly “seek to understand”, and then develop “culturally sensitive” intervention programmes. She also followed the “barefoot doctors” in Sabah, to understand how health services could be delivered through them to remote populations in the rural areas.

Citation for A/Prof Wong Mee Lian

Recipient of College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians Achievement Award 2019

By Clive Tan

She then applied for a teaching position in Singapore and was recruited by Prof Lee to work in NUS in the early 1990s.

At the peak of her career in the earlier part of this decade, she was diagnosed with late stage colon cancer, but she fought hard against the disease, and with the support of her family, her colleagues, church community, and excellent medical care from Professor John Wong and his team – she is now in remission and has since continued her teaching and research back at NUS. As a cancer survivor, she now shares her experience with people diagnosed with cancer, through her informal cancer support groups – encouraging people to fight on, and not give up.

So this would not be the first Award that Prof Wong had won. In 2017, she had already been given a Lifetime Achievement Award in Health and Medical Sciences, by the Venus International Foundation in India. But the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians hope that this award will be the one that she treasures the most. After all, the impact of her work is most felt by the people in Singapore – especially the underserved and the marginalised groups.



From left to right: Mr Paul Lim (husband of A/Prof Wong Mee Lian), A/Prof Wong Mee Lian and Mr Chan Heng Kee

Prof Wong – thank you for always doing your best for others, and for being such an inspiration to the public health and occupational medicine community. Ladies and Gentlemen – the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner – Associate Professor Wong Mee Lian.

Thank You Speech

Recipient of College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians Lifetime Achievement Award 2019

By Wong Mee Lian

I am deeply honoured to receive this lifetime achievement award. I would like to thank the College of Public Health and Occupational Physicians and the committee for selecting me for this award, which I accept with a humble and grateful heart.

This award is not mine alone. I owe a lot to the support of my seniors, mentors, members of my research team, students, peers and the community from whom I have learnt a lot about public health. I would therefore like to share this award with my mentors and teachers who have instilled the right values in me as well as guided and taught me well. I would also like to share it with my students and mentees. They often asked me questions on challenging issues in public health which made me think, reflect, read up, learn more about these issues and apply them in my public health work. In addition, they were most creative when they put their heads together while working in groups on designing a proposal on health promotion or developing health education resources. I have learnt so much from them.

I am truly blessed to be in an area of work that I love and am able to share what I have learnt in public health to improve the health of the population. To be paid for doing what I enjoy is a double bonus and I will always be grateful and thankful for this. I find going down to the community to meet people and do field work or research in public health very interesting, stimulating and meaningful

particularly in my work with the sex workers.

Let me share three important lessons I have learnt from my field work and research, which I feel, can be applied or adapted to other public health situations. My first lesson was learnt through an amusing incident, second through an exciting one, and the last through mixed methods research.

I recall an incident a few years ago when I was at Joo Chiat Road with my research team. We split into pairs to observe what people do and the social cultural environment in which hidden and illegal sex work takes place. As my research nurse and I were walking down Joo Chiat road one night, an 'Ah Pek' (older gentleman) across the road called out to us, beckoning us to go and drink with him. I pounced at this opportunity to learn more about the dynamics of transactional sex from this gentleman who probably wanted to engage in sex. We walked over to him and I asked in my broken Chinese "Do you want to drink with us?" To my amusement and little disappointment, he pointed to my slim and tall nurse with long beautiful hair and replied "not you, but her". He probably thought that I was a mamasan and that my nurse was a Vietnamese entertainment worker. Nevertheless, I was able to engage in a conversation with him to find out more about how and why men engaged in buying sex.

Lesson 1: Immerse yourself in the environment as a participant observer to learn more about public health issues before designing an intervention.

In another more exciting incident, I met up with an agent who had been bringing Vietnamese sex workers to Singapore. A key informant had arranged for me to meet him at his premise. I was really excited to meet him because he could help me and my research team gain entry to the unknown complex networks of entertainment workers who engaged in illegal sex work. However, I got a bit worried when this key informant told us that he will not be there. I told Raymond, my then PhD student, to be my body guard, should things go wrong and should his bouncers manhandle us. Raymond and I brought two big umbrellas in case we need to protect ourselves. There were some tense and uneasy moments but he finally agreed to help us when I shared with him, as a woman myself and as a public health doctor, I cared for the sex workers and I would like to work with him to keep these women healthy till the next phase of their lives when they get married, start a family or take on another job.



A/Prof Wong Mee Lian giving one of the speeches during the College's 2019 Achievement Award during the Fellows' Lunch.

Lesson 2: Most people, even those in vice, do have a generous and kind heart. We need to find common ground with them to solve public health problems collectively.

Women are in sex work not by choice but because of circumstances beyond their control. I find it meaningful to learn that they can be empowered to use condoms with their clients, gain mastery over their lives and be protected from acquiring STIs and reduce its spread in the community. I have come to learn with humility at an early stage of my public health career that the sex workers themselves, and not I, are the experts. In the early 90's when I work with the Department of STI Control (DSC) on the STI prevention project among sex workers to get them to use condoms, I was clueless on how to do it. After all, I am not a sex expert like Masters and Johnson. In our first survey with the 800 plus brothel-based sex workers we found that there were a few among them who could get their clients to use condoms all the time. These women were the EXPERTS and the 'doers'. So I conducted in-depth interviews with them to find out their strategies and how they overcame the barriers faced by their peers who could not do

it – the 'non-doers'. We translated these strategies into video clips and comic scripts which were shared with their 'non-doe' peers. It succeeded in getting them to use condoms. Till today, I regard the community as being very resourceful. Solving their problems requires their input and expertise. We, as the external change agent, need to learn the skills on how to listen, empathize, explore and engage them. I am still adopting this strategy when my team and I are working now on increasing breast cancer screening in Malay women in Singapore.

Lesson 3: Engage the community as our consultants/experts in the design of culturally responsive interventions.

Public health work is not easy and its impact takes time to be seen. What challenges lie ahead for our young public health specialists? WHO has listed the top health threats as outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases like measles and diphtheria, antimicrobial resistance, obesity, physical inactivity, and health impacts of environmental pollution and climate change and multiple humanitarian crises. We need to address the interaction of complex behaviors with the social, physical, and technological environment. Three decades ago, we would have never expected that we need to give incentives to get people to move more or to invest in thousands of dollars on electronic tables to get people to stand at work.

The solutions for these challenging problems involve multiple systems and human-environment - gene interactions, and hence the need for a transdisciplinary approaches. We need to create close links with a wide range of stakeholders, specialists, from other disciplines and the community.

Public health leaders of the future need to be proactive and have passion, humility, open mindedness, creativity, resilience as well as critical thinking and analytical skills, besides a helicopter view, to tackle these challenging health issues particularly if it impacts on the majority in Singapore. However, we should also advocate and advance public health initiatives for the minorities and the socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Health is a basic human right for all and should not just be a privilege for some.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for your presence today and for your support. All of you have in one way or another motivated, inspired, taught, supported, and encouraged me in my work. As I look around, I feel so proud to see many of you, especially my former students, doing so well and holding more senior positions than me.

Public health work is tough but no problem is insurmountable. A problem well defined is a problem half solved. So always stay positive and be happy. I would like to close by quoting Grant Fairley, "A positive attitude may not solve every problem but it makes solving any problem a more pleasant experience especially when you work and learn alongside with other people".

Thank you.

Associate Professor Wong Mee Lian

CME Talk 20 August 2019

The College organised a CME talk on 20 August at which Dr Yvette Van Der Eijk gave a talk on the topic “The Internal Tobacco Industry Documents”.



Fellows' Lunch 15 October 2019

The College organised a Fellows' Lunch on the first day of the 14th Singapore Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference 2019 at the Osia Steak and Seafood Grill, Resorts World at Sentosa. 41 Fellows gathered together to socialise, network, and catch up with friends during the conference.



Year-End Get-Together

15 November 2019

Nineteen Fellows attended the Year-End Get-Together held on 15 November 2019 at Yardbird, Marina Bay Sands.



Welcoming and Introducing our new Fellows

My journey as an OM physician

“There’s an interesting course that I think you should attend” said Prof. Chng Hiok Hee, then my boss in TTSH, and which was how I fell into the field of Occupational Medicine, by a series of happy accidents.

An introductory course on health hazards in healthcare workers in 2003, conducted by the late Prof Aw Tar Ching at the Community, Occupational and Family Medicine Department, Faculty of Medicine, NUS, piqued my interest, and I signed up for the Master of Medicine (Occupational Medicine) the following year. Foundational modules in the course such as epidemiology and various aspects of Public Health were enticing, however Occupational Medicine won out with opportunities for clinical practice and the chance to appreciate what employees actually do in workplaces.

Encouraged by Prof Chia Sin Eng to apply my training, I joined the Specialist Department, Occupational Safety and Health Division, Ministry of Manpower where there were unique opportunities in various industry sectors and a chance to learn from engineer colleagues subjects ranging from occupational hygiene, engineering safety, construction safety and so on. Visiting the MRT tunnels and stations when they were still under construction when these were previously off limits to females as it was considered “pantang” or “bad luck” for

women to enter the sites, factories and manufacturing facilities, pharmaceutical plants, healthcare organisations, food and beverage facilities, banks and even provision stalls at the market over the years, have allowed me to gain a range of insights into the interactions between work and health, and practical issues on the ground.

Such experiences also came in useful when investigating interesting cases of lead poisoning, outbreaks of infectious diseases, occupational asthma, hearing loss, heat stroke and musculoskeletal disorders of the upper limb just to name a few. What was more satisfying was being able to directly improve the health of workers in the company and eventually on a broader scale through the development of guidelines on improving the work environment for employers and workplace safety and health professionals.

Lest you think there are no emergencies in the civil service, there are occasional scenarios when we have to respond urgently, and a recent event that comes to mind was the situation when asbestos containing material was found on St John’s Island last year. With my colleagues, we came together to support the various lead agencies to ensure that these were safely removed and to reassure the public. Further back in 2013, a particularly severe and prolonged episode of transboundary haze



Lucy Leong

affected Singapore and again we came together and supported the lead agencies and issued guidance to employers to advise on measures to take to protect employees. It certainly felt rather like a huge military exercise as we were all huddled at another ministry trying to manage the issues on the ground.

On the home front, I dabble in various hobbies ranging from orchid growing (in the past) to photography, and developing my birdwatching skills, and appreciating Chinese tea.

It’s been 16 years since those fateful words and the happy start of my journey in Occupational Medicine has been and continues to be fulfilling and meaningful.

Improving the Learning Experience and Building a Collaborative Culture within the National Preventive Medicine Residency Programme

By Lim Huai Yang

Dr Lim Huai Yang is Chief Resident of the NPMR Programme.

The Greatest Challenge of the National Preventive Medicine Residency Programme

Public health and occupational medicine are two inter-related and extremely broad specialties. The breadth of knowledge and repertoire of skill-sets required of public health and occupational medicine specialists are unparalleled among medical specialties. Beyond breadth, depth of knowledge and domain expertise are often required since the nature of our work revolves around policy and management. Because our work has far reaching impact on the lives of diverse populations of people, ‘softer’ skills like communication, persuasion, and negotiation, are vital to the effective public health and occupational medicine specialist.

In light of these, it is not surprising to note that the greatest challenge of a residency programme that trains public health and occupational medicine specialists, is coming up with the training programme.

Planting the Seeds of Change

After I was accepted into the National Preventive Medicine Residency (NPMR) Programme in 2016, I deferred the training for a year to complete my Masters of Public Health in Harvard, before officially starting my first posting in 2017. Like all other residents, the education received from my Masters formed the foundation of my competency and identity as a public health practitioner, while the weekly Thursday teachings served as the building blocks to continually expand the breadth and depth of my abilities.

Through my residency rotations every 6 months, I was exposed to various challenging real world public health issues. For many of us, our postings were where the rubber meets the road; where we were required to translate head knowledge into practical action. It wasn't before long that I realized that the Thursday teachings in the previous form was not able to equip me with the necessary competency to perform my tasks; I was also having trouble navigating the various formative and summative assessments in the programme. Eventually, I found out that other residents shared similar sentiments: that we needed to enhance our learning experience. This common appreciation gave birth to collective action. Led by Calvin Chiew, our Chief Resident in 2018, we came together, solicited ideas and feedback, and brainstormed ways to improve the Thursday training.

Empowered by our Programme Director, Associate Professor Jason Yap, a small team of residents redesigned the structure of the Thursday teaching and introduced the new system in January 2019. The training sessions for each month is now organized

around a particular theme, with each Thursday session covering a different aspect of the theme. These ‘series’ of training sessions seeks to provide improved continuity and coverage of the theme. For example, we chose the theme of Mental Health for the month of January 2019 as a pilot for the new system; in the first session, we covered the epidemiology of mental health disorders, and applied data interpretation skills; in the second session, we studied a mental health programme, performed paper critique, and discussed systems and policy issues; in the third session, we examined mental health at the work place. In February, we had diabetes as the subject matter, and organized the sessions with the similar framework of: 1) Epidemiology and Data Interpretation, 2) Paper Critique, and 3) Policy and Practice. The organization of each series of training sessions are completely resident-led, with senior residents leading and mentoring junior residents in the process.



The author presenting his group's work, presided over by subject matter experts

Cultivating Change

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, the resident's committee actively sought feedback, and through a survey conducted in June 2019, we found out that the new system was very well received by all the residents. The seeds of change have been planted, and the early results have been encouraging; residents felt more engaged, felt clearer about the objectives of each session, and felt more empowered to influence the quality of their training.

We have since refreshed our residents' committee, and have embarked on several new and exciting initiatives to enhance the learning quality and experience of our residents.

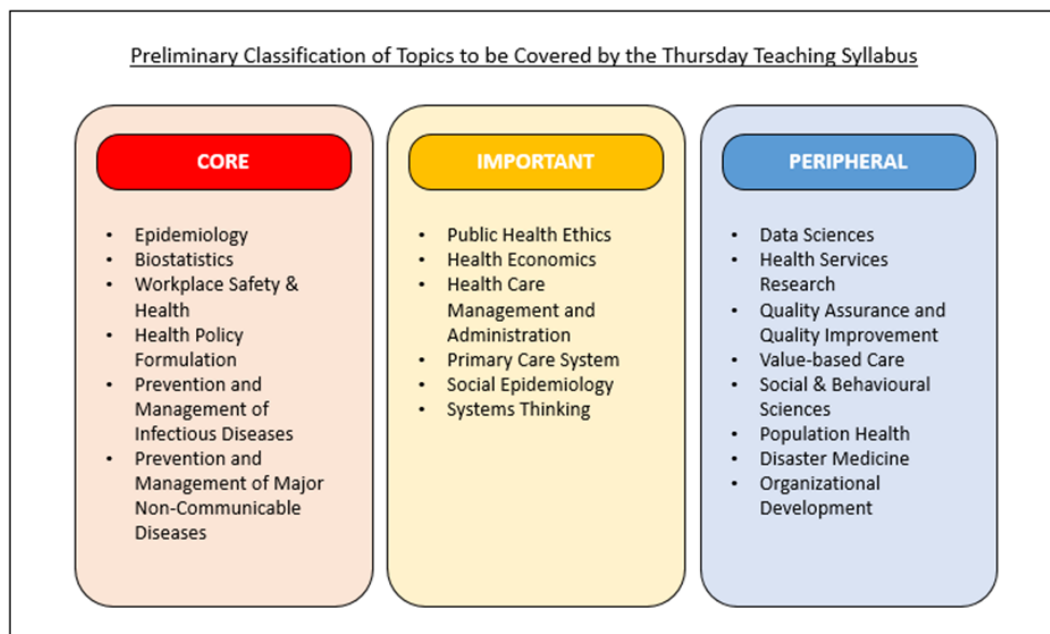
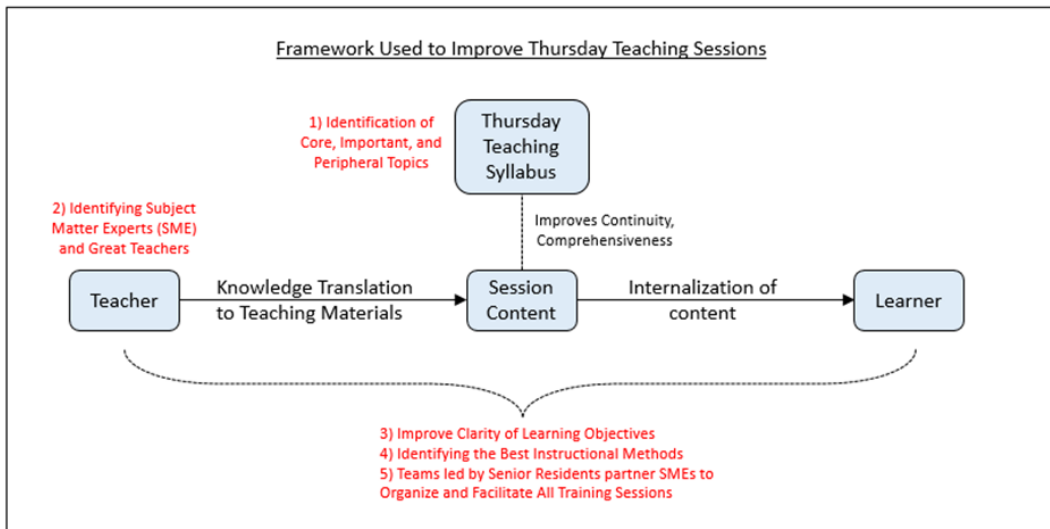
Improving the Learning Experience and Building a Collaborative Culture within the National Preventive Medicine Residency Programme (Cont'd)

Among these initiatives are: 1) Development of a Thursday teaching curriculum, 2) Establishing and maintaining a Knowledge Library, and 3) Resident-led group projects. Specifically for the Thursday teaching curriculum, we have begun defining what's core, what's important, and what's peripheral to our training, and aim to develop a yearlong syllabus of sorts.

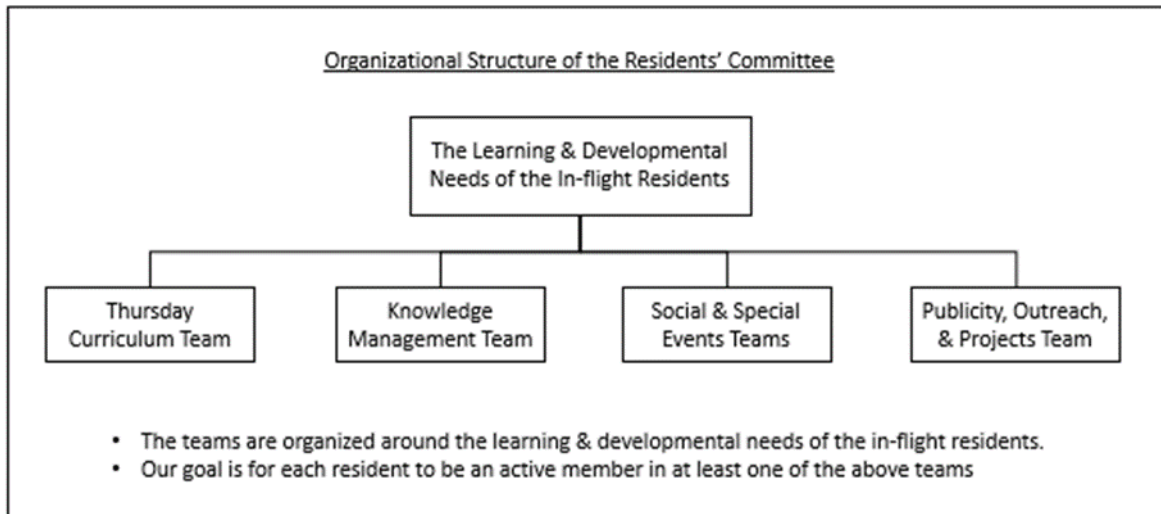
We've also started collating a list of subject matter experts who happen to be excellent classroom teachers as well, with the intention of inviting them back as regular speakers. Next, we have be-

gun introducing a simple format to help residents and speakers define learning objectives with greater clarity; this will be coupled with efforts to identify the most appropriate instructional methods for each teaching session.

Each of these initiatives came about through an iterative process that saw each idea refined and sharpened by discussions among equal partners within the residents' committee. We often found ourselves bouncing ideas off each other, and building on each other's' ideas.



Improving the Learning Experience and Building a Collaborative Culture within the National Preventive Medicine Residency Programme (Cont'd)



At the heart of all these initiatives, is a genuine desire to enhance the learning journey of each and every resident, to introduce systems perspectives, and to create a close-knit family of Public Health and Occupational Medicine specialists who can support one another during and beyond the residency.

Looking Forward to the Harvest

As the saying goes, 'A journey of a thousand miles, begins with a single step'. What our predecessors have started, we will build on and improve through consensus and collective action. We are building up a momentum to take more ownership and effect positive changes to our learning, and I am confident that if we, as well as those that come after us stayed united and committed, we can play a big role in creating a truly powerful residency programme. A programme that would produce specialists who would go on to impact our health care system in diverse and far-reaching ways. Like my fellow resident Tyson Chan, I share the vision that one day, all Public Health and Occupational Medicine specialists would be among the most influential members of the health care community.



The current batch of in-flight residents with their favourite programme coordinator, Karin, at the recent 14th Public Health and Occupational Medicine Conference.

Upcoming Taiwan Study Trip 2020

20-22 February 2020

AN ANNUAL COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH & OCCUPATIONAL PHYSICIANS EVENT



20TH - 22ND FEBRUARY 2020

TAIWAN STUDY TRIP



DAY 1

📅 20 FEB, THUR, AM

SYMPOSIUM 1

- Benefits and challenges of the healthcare financing system in Taiwan
- National strategies targeted at communicable diseases control in Taiwan

📅 20 FEB, THUR, PM

SITE VISIT 1

- OSCE
- e-ward
- Hospital Visit

DAY 2

📅 21 FEB, FRI, AM

SYMPOSIUM 2

- National strategies targeted at non-communicable diseases control in Taiwan
- Occupational Medicine practice in Taiwan and challenges faced

📅 21 FEB, FRI, PM

SITE VISIT 2

- Northern Department of Workers Health Services Center, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Ministry of Labor

📅 21 FEB, FRI, NIGHT

Thank You Dinner with TW Speakers and Faculty

DAY 3

📅 22 FEB, SAT, AM

CPHOP Fellowship Brunch

\$500

TRAVEL GRANT FOR FELLOWS*

*REFER TO APPLICATION FORM FOR TERMS & CONDITIONS



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