

Reflections on COVID-19: Dr Tricia Kuah Zhi Ling

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It was a great privilege to serve at the frontlines of the COVID-19 outbreak. As the number of confirmed cases grew, the screening centre at NCID (National Centre for Infectious Diseases) required greater manpower to meet its rising patient load. When I heard that Radiology medical officers were being recruited, I saw it as a rare opportunity to serve our patients in a different way than what our daily duties entailed.

The outbreak situation was dynamic and we had to adapt to everchanging clinical protocols, sometimes revised within the day. The hotspot list was updated in real time as new information surfaced from contact tracing and new clusters appeared locally and overseas. Pre-shift briefings, MOH circulars and reading the local news were necessary in ensuring we were up to date with the latest developments. While this required adaptability and flexibility on our part, it was also exciting and satisfying to observe the tangible impact our actions made on the frontline.

We worked alongside consultants, registrars and fellow medical officers from different disciplines. Everyone was in high spirits despite the discomfort from the protective attire and risk of contracting the virus. It was refreshing how the hierarchy had dissolved among us; I have gained many friendships through this experience and am truly grateful. Everyone's morale was also constantly boosted by the endless delivery of snacks donated by fellow Singaporeans!

There were occasions of patients who did not fulfil the criteria for a swab becoming teary and anxious. It was difficult allaying their fears and was a true test of communication skills. Indeed, I have learnt that the fight against COVID-19 involves a mental battle as well, and it is our job as doctors to address this aspect over and above our other duties.

I am grateful to my Radiology seniors and colleagues for tirelessly reporting the stat chest X-rays during this period. The plain film load was invariably high as the X-ray played a pivotal role in clinical management – patients with radiographic features of infection were admitted while those without X-ray findings and other high risk features were discharged. Though Radiology may not share the same level of patient contact as other specialties, its central role in clinical medicine cannot be disputed. It bears the ability to significantly alter the direction of clinical management and it has the capacity to impact a large number of patients in a short amount of time.

Serving at the frontlines has been a humbling experience. It was inspiring to see doctors from different disciplines working together to keep Singapore safe. I am thankful to my family and friends for their unwavering support during this period.



Dr Tricia Kuah (1st from left) working at NCID screening centre.