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One-stop affordable health & community care at Serangoon New Town

On 23 May 2014, NTUC Unity Healthcare and National Healthcare Group (NHG) jointly announced the opening of NTUC Unity Family Medicine Clinic (Unity FMC) to provide one-stop affordable healthcare for residents in the Serangoon New Town and Braddell Heights housing estates.

Unity FMC was officially opened by Mr Lim Swee Say, NTUC Secretary-General and Minister, Prime Minister’s Office. Said Secretary-General Lim, “NTUC social enterprises are committed to keep doing more good in support of our working people and their families. The opening of Unity FMC expands the healthcare footprint of NTUC Social Enterprises into the Singapore heartlands. It will strengthen the quality, capacity and affordability of community healthcare in an ageing population.”

Partnership with NHG boosts Unity FMC’s healthcare delivery

A collaborative effort by NHG and NTUC Unity Healthcare, Unity FMC leverages the clinical and administrative strengths of NHG, through its primary care arm, the National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), to set up the facilities and to provide integrated and comprehensive health and community care to more families, particularly patients with chronic conditions.

Said Professor Chee Yam Cheng, Group CEO of the NHG, “NHG is committed to supporting Singapore’s vision of achieving high quality healthcare and a healthy population. The opening up of Unity FMC will further strengthen NHG’s Regional Healthcare System to provide accessible and integrated healthcare services to the population in the central region of Singapore. The collaboration between NHG and Unity Healthcare is a win-win partnership that leverages on the clinical strengths of NHG and the community networks of NTUC Unity Healthcare to provide better healthcare for the community. Together, we look forward to adding more years of healthy life to our population.”

Patients from any healthcare institutions can be referred to the Unity FMC if they choose to seek treatment there, and if they are deemed suitable for follow-up care in the community nearer their homes. NHGP is working closely with Unity FMC to refer suitable polyclinic patients to be cared for at the FMC. The doctors of these patients will communicate their medical information and test results to Unity FMC doctors to ensure continuity of care.
The FMC is part of the government’s plan to provide continuing care in the community and complement general practitioners in enhancing care for our rapidly ageing population, thus giving patients within the community more care options especially for chronic diseases.

Unity FMC works on the premise that patients need a system that is easy to navigate, and is motivated enough to actively partner their doctors to manage their condition. Unity FMC is well-positioned to deliver good health and community care because of a confluence of winning factors.

**Strategic location in the heart of the housing estate**
First, Unity FMC is strategically and conveniently situated in the heart of the housing estate in Serangoon Central, easily accessible by community dwelling patients who require regular check-ups. Patients who might otherwise be deterred from visiting their doctors because of the inconvenience of going to polyclinics further away from their home might be more willing to visit their doctors to manage their conditions.

**Comprehensive and personalised care under one roof**
With its excellent team of healthcare professionals and good facilities, Unity FMC offers patients comprehensive and personalised care. Apart from the usual services available at general practitioners’ clinics, patients will be able to receive support services such as dietetic and laboratory services. Patients requiring physiotherapy sessions will be referred to NTUC Eldercare’s Silver Circle (Serangoon Central), located next door, for physiotherapy services. At every visit, patients will also see the same doctor who is familiar with their medical history.

**Conducive environment and positive experience**
On top of having a pleasant and welcoming environment for patients, Unity FMC has a system to allow patients to make doctor appointments, significantly reducing waiting time at the clinic.

**Affordable treatment and subsidies**
In addition, patients subsidised under the Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) or Public Assistance (PA) Scheme will be able to use these at Unity FMC. Patients can also tap onto their Medisave funds to manage their chronic diseases under the Medisave Chronic Disease Management Programme.

**Good community care**
As a health and wellness hub in the community, Unity FMC partners grassroots organisations to carry out community health screenings and conduct health education talks, empowering residents with the knowledge and skills to take charge of their own health. The health screening started in May 2014 while the talks are scheduled to begin in June 2014.

**NTUC Social Enterprises expanding social footprint**
In addition to Unity FMC, two other NTUC social enterprises, NTUC Eldercare and NTUC First Campus have opened a senior care centre and a childcare centre respectively, next to Unity FMC. Together, these three centres represent the distinct NTUC social enterprises’ way of providing services to meet the various needs of society in different regions in Singapore.

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**Services at Unity FMC**
- Acute Primary Care
- Chronic Care
- Diabetic Foot Screening (DFS)*
- Diabetic Retinal Photography (DRP)*
- Dietetic Services*
- Health Screening
- Laboratory Services
- Occupational Health Services
- Podiatry Services*
- Treatment Procedures
- Vaccinations, Pre and Post Travel Consultation

*By appointment basis

**Opening Hours**
**Mon to Fri**
9.00am – 6.00pm
- Last registration for morning consultation at 12.00pm
- Closed for lunch from 1.00pm – 2.00pm
- Last registration for afternoon consultation at 5.00pm

**Sat**
9.00am – 1.00pm
Last registration at 12.00pm

**Sun & PH**
Closed

**Address**
Blk 264 Serangoon Central #01-205, Singapore 550264
Tel: 6281 2638
Fax: 6281 2745
Email: enquiryfmc@unity.com.sg

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**Do you know?**
The Unity Family Medicine Clinic is NHG’s second FMC after the Ang Mo Kio FMC opened in May 2013.
Healthcare Humanity Awards 2014

The mark of a good organisation is often measured by its staff. This year, four staff from NHGP and one from National Healthcare Group Diagnostics (NHGD) received the prestigious Healthcare Humanity Awards (HHA) recognising their extraordinary dedication in caring for the sick and the infirm. This year’s winners, a mixture of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, were chosen from 21 healthcare institutions. They each received a silver medallion and $1,500 from President Tony Tan Keng Yam at Matrix @ Biopolis Auditorium on 14 May. Get to know more about these exemplary individuals from NHGP and NHGD.

“"I decided to pursue a career in nursing in 1998. Working in the polyclinic is something I always wanted to do as I have a deep interest in community health.”

As a nurse manager, Richard plays a more administrative role in the clinic today. But he is ever ready to roll up his sleeves to do the day-to-day groundwork when the need arises. His down-to-earth demeanour, genuine concern for his staff, and his collaborative working style have strengthened working relationships across the departments.

“I used to work in a male-dominated environment when I was a senior medic at the Singapore Air Force for 12 years. When I joined NHGP, I needed to adjust my working style to fit in the female-dominated field. For instance, I needed to be more mindful about the challenges faced by nurses who are young working mothers juggling work and family. Over the years, I have learnt to understand and appreciate the importance of work-life balance for my team.”

Richard is passionate about quality improvement. In his role as a DOT (Directly Observed Therapy) champion at NHGP, he works with the Tuberculosis Control Unit to flag out patients who have other psychosocial issues that may hinder the completion of their tuberculosis treatment. He also provides valuable input to improve the follow up of patients with tuberculosis.

“I strongly feel that we should venture beyond our polyclinic to engage our community partners. This will enable us to reach out to a wider segment of the community whom we might not have a chance to interact with.” Richard is a fervent supporter of numerous grassroots and volunteer activities. Currently, he and Deputy Head of Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic Dr Djoni Huang are working with the Nam Hong Siang Theon Free Medical Centre to set up a free medical clinic in the Woodlands/Marsiling area.

“"We are a strong believer in continuous process improvements.”

When Janet started working at Hougang Polyclinic’s laboratory in 2010, she observed that work processes were not optimised. The turnaround time was long, and the waiting area was crowded. With support from the management, Janet led a team to improve the lab’s processes. Two years later, the team developed a robust lab appointment system, which cut the lab waiting time for patients with a same-day consultation by 70%.

In late 2012, Janet helped lead the renovation works to expand the capacity at four labs such that 95% of the lab tests are done onsite for better patient care. She also volunteered to review the quality control results of all the nine labs at NHGP’s clinics, despite her having her hands full as Hougang Polyclinic’s lab-in-charge. Recently, she established the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee to promote workplace improvements. Janet explains, “It is important to eliminate waste in our system so that we can have more time for patient care.”

Janet also cares about her colleagues and the community at large. Last year, Janet championed fund raising among her colleagues to help the victims of the Haiyan typhoon. Separately, she rallied her colleagues to raise funds to support a colleague whose family was affected by the disaster. Janet also does volunteer work at Thye Hua Kwan Moral Home and Silra Home.

When asked about her aspiration at work, Janet replies, “I wish to be part of the healthcare team that strives to transform Singapore’s healthcare system. I also seek to work towards enabling seamless care across the institutions and to raise the standards of public education on laboratory medicine.”

Richard Low Sai Yin (37)
The Nurse Manager of Woodlands Polyclinic is the first male Nurse Manager in the polyclinic setting in Singapore.

Janet Teng (33)
The Senior Medical Technologist of NHGD has the courage to challenge the status quo for better patient care.

About HHA The HHA is a continuing legacy to the Courage Awards that were given out in year 2003 after the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in Singapore. It recognises frontline healthcare workers who exemplify values like courage, extraordinary dedication, selflessness, steadfastness in ethics, compassion, and humanity.
“Nursing is not just a job. It is a service for your fellow mankind in need.”

Katherine started her nursing career in 1979 as an assistant nurse. She worked in several public and private hospitals before joining NHGP in 2009. Katherine spent 18 years volunteering with Operation Smile, an international children’s charity group that performs free surgery on children born with cleft lip, cleft palate and other facial deformities. She helped take patient history before the operations, and taught the parents and local nurses to care for the surgical wounds. She also volunteered with a church group to provide free health screening for an under-privileged community with a high prevalence of HIV and tuberculosis in China.

Katherine’s roles in the clinic include providing women’s screening such as Pap smear and child health surveillance and promoting breast health for women, among others. She is also the Child Developmental Assessment Champion of the clinic. Her colleagues often approach her when they have queries related to child developmental assessment. Due to her dedication to and competency in the subject matter, she also helps conduct training for other colleagues in NHGP.

“I am happy to be part of NHGP as the organisation forges ahead in community healthcare,” says Katherine. “Every day at work is memorable as I attend to people from all walks of life. Sometimes patients even bring us food to show their appreciation.”

Dr Low’s dedication to his patients is evident when he calls them during his lunch hour or after work to follow up on their conditions. During the H1N1 outbreak in 2009, Dr Low and a handful of colleagues worked in a fever tent pitched outside the polyclinic, attending to patients who were possibly infected. On one occasion, a patient collapsed in the clinic and Dr Low went the extra mile, literally, to accompany the patient in the ambulance to provide additional medical support.

Dr Low completed his Master of Medicine (Family Medicine) training in 2007 and has been with Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic since 2009. While it is a challenge providing the best care for each patient amidst the high patient load, he says the support from his clinic management and colleagues keeps him going. “I am very happy as my clinic management is fair and understanding. I am grateful for the many courses and opportunities that NHGP has given me throughout the years.”

In addition to seeing patients, Dr Low makes time to teach young doctors and medical students. As a former key trainer at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, he believes that guiding the next generation of doctors and sharing knowledge among colleagues are key in advancing medicine.

When asked about what he wishes people to know about his work, he replies, “Family Medicine in the polyclinic is busy and challenging, as we have patients with multiple complicated issues. However, it can be very fulfilling to work in primary care as we are in a position to tackle many health issues early on and look at the various aspects of health.”

“I love to serve patients. I will do my best to help them and make them feel better before they leave the clinic. When I see that they are happy and they thank me, it keeps me going.”

Doris recounted her first month at NHGP in May 2012. The English- and Malay-educated Peranakan attendant recalled a patient who yelled at her in the waiting area when she had difficulty replying to the patient in Mandarin. The incident left her in tears – she was embarrassed and upset that she could not be more helpful to the patient.

Today, Doris is capable of handling tough queries from patients, even conversing with them in Mandarin. She received the ICARE Champion Award last year, a recognition given by NHGP to staff who receive more than 15 compliments in a year. To serve patients better, Doris took the initiative to develop herself. She attended several courses on basic first aid, crisis communication, and managing crisis behaviours.

On the personal front, Doris finds time to give back to the society by volunteering at various healthcare institutions, churches, and eldercare homes. “The other volunteers and I cooked porridge for over a hundred elderly people in church. We also cut hair for patients in the Institute of Mental Health and for the elderly at HDB void decks.” These are the memorable experiences to Doris.

“Sometimes, my days at work can be tough, just like anyone else’s,” Doris answers when asked about the challenges she faces at work, “but when you understand the meaning of your work, you don’t feel tired or frustrated.”
Never, never, never give up

Esther Tan Lee Tiang, 48, Health Attendant at Woodlands Polyclinic, continues to serve others even after she was diagnosed with kidney failure five years ago. She received the PS21 STAR Service Award this year in recognition of her great service despite longstanding personal challenges.

In October last year, Esther started her dialysis and has converted to working part-time since. Even though she is unable to help out with tasks that are more physically demanding, such as pushing wheelchair-bound patients to different floors, she continues to support the clinic team. She helps out in the consult rooms, sometimes acting as a translator when the need arises.

“Initially I was on hemodialysis, and needed to go to the dialysis centre three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. But I wanted to continue to work. So early this year, I changed to the ‘fluid type’.”

Esther refers to peritoneal dialysis. It is an alternative treatment to hemodialysis, which can be carried out at home. A special sterile fluid is introduced into the abdomen through a permanent tube that is placed in the peritoneal cavity. The fluid circulates through abdomen to draw impurities from surrounding blood vessels, and is then drained from the body.

Every night, Esther attaches herself to the machine called a cycler, which will change the dialysate solution. The process takes 10 hours. As it is less disruptive to Esther’s daily schedule, she can continue to work in the day. When asked why she decided to continue working, she replies, “My family hoped that I would stop working, but I don’t want to burden my family with my medical expenses. After all, my children have just started work. My youngest son is still in university. He will be graduating next year. Besides, I like this job. I have supportive bosses and colleagues. They are aware of my condition and have given me much support. When I started dialysis last year, my colleagues raised funds to help me.”

Even though Esther has to go for countless treatments and consultations, she continues to do well at work. Mr Marcus Goh, Acting Operations Manager of Woodlands Polyclinic, says, “Esther has never asked for any special favours at work despite her medical condition. I am humbled by her perseverance and positive attitude.”

“I remember an incident vividly. There was an occasion when Esther sensed that a patient didn’t fully understand what was communicated to her by the attending doctor. When the patient left the consult room, she told the patient to wait outside the room and she took time to explain the earlier communication to her again,” Marcus recalls.

“My medical condition helps me relate better to many chronic patients in our clinic. With that, I hope I can help make their experience in the clinic a pleasant one,” says Esther.

Marcus describes Esther’s tenacity as a courageous one. And courage doesn’t always roar. In Esther’s case, she keeps a positive outlook in face of this life-changing event, and continues to contribute in her small ways every day.

“My medical condition helps me relate better to many chronic patients in our clinic. With that, I hope I can help make their experience in the clinic a pleasant one.”

What is the PS21 STAR Service Award?

PS21 STAR Service Award is a prestigious annual award that recognises and rewards public officers who have consistently demonstrated high standards of service excellence. The award goes to those who have outstanding records of offering consistent and superior service to internal and external customers. Of the eight public officers from health sector given the award in 2014, one was from NHGP.
Empowering staff at Lentor Residence in MRDO management

To reach out to the community, NHGP’s infection control team conducted talks on managing multi-drug resistant microorganisms (MRDO) and hand hygiene on 6 and 7 March 2014 at Lentor Residence. The talks brought together 80 staff from the private nursing home to share and learn from one another.

The session started with an icebreaker where glitter balls were passed from one nurse to the next, demonstrating how easily dirty hands can transmit microorganisms. As the number of patients with MDRO is on an upward trajectory, the talk provided an overview and management of MDRO and the role of hand hygiene in breaking the chain of infection in long-term care facilities.

Later, the participants watched several videos that reinforced their learning. The room was filled with excitement during the quiz and group activity. The session ended with a Q&A session, and participants were provided with lunch and door gifts sponsored by Johnson and Johnson.

A Sweet Affair: Public forum on diabetes

Some 70 people, most of whom were senior citizens, turned up at Bukit Batok Polyclinic on 15 February for a public forum “A Sweet Affair – Diabetes”, conducted in Mandarin. Organised by the National Healthcare Group Pharmacy, the forum featured multidisciplinary guest speakers – a family physician, care manager, pharmacist, and dietitian – to empower patients with diabetes and their caregivers to manage the illness holistically.

Attendees participated in interactive talks and a Q&A session. Health education booths were set up at the event, where participants could take part in hands-on learning on how to operate the home monitoring and insulin administration devices. Participants were also rewarded with gifts when they answered diabetes-related questions correctly at the quiz station.

The event received favourable feedback from the participants. Some participants even stayed back after the event to find out more about diabetes from the guest speakers.

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month campaign

Colorectal cancer is the number one cancer in Singapore among men and women. During the Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March 2014, NHGP collaborated with Singapore Cancer Society (SCS) to raise the awareness of colorectal cancer. As the risk of colorectal cancer is higher among those 50 years and over, the campaign emphasised the importance of colorectal cancer screening to patients and visitors at NHGP’s polyclinics.

NHGP’s Health Promotion and Preventive Care division also set up educational booths in all its clinics. To encourage people aged 50 years and above and without any symptoms of colorectal cancer to have a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) once a year, NHGP worked with SCS to distribute FIT kits to eligible patients at all nine clinics.

What is FIT?

The Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) is a safe, quick and easy test that detects colorectal cancer early through the presence of small amounts of blood in the stool which may not be visible to the naked eye.
NHGP hosts foreign healthcare officers

A group of 24 government officers from the health departments and hospitals of developing countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America visited Bukit Batok Polyclinic on 12 March. The purpose of this visit was to study Singapore’s healthcare policies and regulatory frameworks for healthcare developments.

During the visit, NHGP CEO Mr Leong Yew Meng shared about Singapore’s population trends and NHGP’s efforts in transforming care. Dr Keith Tsou, Head of Bukit Batok Polyclinic, and Adjunct A/Prof Chong Phui-Nah, Senior Director of Family Medicine Development and Primary Care Academy, then led the delegates on a tour around the clinic and the Family Medicine Academy. After the session, the delegates shared that they gained a better understanding of Singapore’s primary healthcare sector.

NHG Pharmacy shares management experience

NHG Pharmacy (NHGPh) hosted a visit by the Singapore Health Services on 26 February 2014. During the session, NHGPh’s management team shared their experiences in managing the retail pharmacy chain at NHGP, covering topics such as retail operations, merchandising and marketing, as well as their challenges. The visitors expressed that the learning was useful in their plans to centralise the retail pharmacies under the group.

Hosting HMDP visiting expert

From 17 to 22 February 2014, NHG Pharmacy hosted a visiting expert under the Health Manpower Development Plan (HMDP) – Dr William Gong, Associate Professor of Clinical Pharmacy and Director for Residency and Fellowship Training at the University of Southern California (USC) School of Pharmacy. Dr Gong is one of the pioneers for Ambulatory Care and Residency training in the United States.

Dr Gong first visited Choa Chu Kang Polyclinic, where he observed a clinical pharmacist in action at the Hypertension, Diabetes and Lipids (HDL) clinic. Then, he took a guided tour of Bukit Batok Polyclinic led by the Clinic Head Dr Keith Tsou. As part of the programme, Dr Elaine Tan, Director of Collaborative Care of NHGP, shared with Dr Gong the institution’s Transformation of Care project – a pilot at Toa Payoh Polyclinic to transform the model of care at NHGP.

During his visit in Singapore, Dr Gong conducted talks for clinical pharmacists on ambulatory care services and the credentialing system in the States.

About HMDP Visiting Expert scheme

The Health Manpower Development Plan Visiting Expert (HMDP VE) scheme provides funds for overseas experts in medical and health-related fields to be brought to Singapore so as to impart their skills and share their knowledge. It is run by the Ministry of Health (MOH). This scheme aims to improve and upgrade our medical and health team’s expertise in the respective disciplines. As part of the HMDP programme, experts will conduct lectures, seminars and workshops as well as visit various departments of hospitals/institutions. The HMDP VE scheme is available to all healthcare clusters, Health Promotion Board, Health Sciences Authority and MOH.
Preparing against Anthrax

On 15 March 2014, Hougang Polyclinic participated in an Emergency Preparedness Exercise. The exercise tested the operational readiness of the clinic in responding to a civil emergency. The exercise was conducted with the help of volunteers from the other eight NHGP’s polyclinics and headquarters, while observers from NHG, MOH and SingHealth were also present.

The exercise illustrated NHGP’s integral role of assisting MOH during emergencies by providing medical or psychological support upon activation. For Hougang Polyclinic, the focus of the exercise was converting the polyclinic into a Drug Dispensing Centre (DDC) within a stipulated time in the event of a terrorist attack by anthrax agent. Under this DDC plan, the polyclinic’s role was to administer prophylaxis to all potentially exposed cases and each polyclinic would be required to operate continuously on a 24-hour basis for the first three days once activated by MOH. The exercise was a success and a good learning opportunity for NHGP to plan their anthrax layout.

Inaugural NHGP Operations Day 2014

Over 400 staff from NHGP’s Operations Division turned up at the River Safari Singapore to celebrate the inaugural Operations Day on 22 February 2014. This year, staff also invited their family members to celebrate the occasion together. At the event, Ms Grace Chiang, Chief Operating Officer of NHGP, gave special thanks to all clinic and HQ staff for their hard work and efforts over the past year, and commended the organising committee on a successful event.
NHGP promotes health and wellness to staff

Weighing in for 1 Million KG Challenge
To support the nation-wide weight management initiative 1 Million kg Challenge™, NHGP worked with National Healthcare Group to bring a roadshow to its headquarters on 3 April 2014. At the event, about 70 NHGP staff signed up for the challenge and did a weigh-in at the Wellness Kiosks specially brought in for the roadshow.

Launched by the Health Promotion Board on 15 March, the 1 Million kg Challenge™ aims to encourage Singaporeans to take small steps towards a healthier lifestyle at a pace suited for each individual. The initiative rewards every healthy action with “pixels” which can be used to redeem prizes. Pixels can be earned through monthly weigh-ins at Wellness Kiosks, reading exclusive portal content, attending health activities or achieving weight loss goals.

Lunch dates with dietitians
NHGP staff gathered during their break to learn from their dietitian colleagues on how to achieve a balanced diet amidst their busy schedules. The lunchtime sessions were conducted at all NHGP’s polyclinics and headquarters over four days from 11 to 14 March, in conjunction with Dietitian’s Day on 12 March 2014.

According to the National Nutrition Survey 2010, there has been a significant drop in people eating home-cooked meals. Eating out more often means people have less control over the quantity and quality of their food. Hence, NHGP dietitians introduced the concept of Healthy Plate – a simple visual guide to help people choose the right type and amount of food in a plate setting. A pasta salad making session was also conducted to give staff hands-on experience in creating quick, healthy and tasty meals. Staff received goodie bags with healthy food items, recipes, and an apron specially designed by the dietitians.

Celebrating healthy smiles
Our mouth is a mirror of our overall health. In celebration of the World Oral Health Day on 20 March, NHGP’s Dental Division organised a roadshow themed “Celebrating Healthy Smiles” to share dental health information and oral health care tips with some 150 staff.

World Oral Health Day is celebrated every year on the same day. It is an initiative by the World Dental Federation to increase awareness of oral health. It highlights the importance and benefits of good oral health, as well as the impact of oral diseases on general health. Globally, up to 90% of school children and nearly all adults have dental cavities and severe gum disease, which may result in tooth loss. These conditions often lead to pain and discomfort, affecting one’s quality of life.

Workplace safety and health celebration
NHGP celebrated the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Day in February and March 2014. The celebration included a series of lunchtime talks and exhibitions across the nine NHGP’s polyclinics and its headquarters.

To increase the awareness and knowledge about workplace safety and health among staff, the talks and exhibitions covered topics such as sharp injuries; infectious diseases and hand hygiene; slips, trips and falls; and office ergonomics. A multimedia interactive hazard identification game was introduced this year to facilitate learning in a fun way!
Dr Manojkumar Amarlal Kharbanda, Family Physician at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, does not mince words when he says that “family medicine is very exciting”. While family physicians traditionally provided primary care services, their role has evolved to keep abreast of Singapore’s ageing population. As the first line of care for most Singaporeans, family doctors now work hand-in-hand with other healthcare professionals, family members and community resources to provide preventive, personal, comprehensive and continuing care to the patients and families.

The personal and comprehensive nature of family medicine is what drew Dr Valerie Teo to the field. A Resident Physician at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, Dr Teo says, “The concept of treating a patient, his children, his parents and his grandparents has always been a big appeal to me. I also enjoy working with the elderly and the day-to-day interactions with my patients in the clinic.”

At National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP), family doctors also have opportunities to venture beyond their medical practice. One example is Dr Lee Kwang How, who wears many hats as a family physician, administrator and teacher at Bukit Batok Polyclinic. These roles give Dr Lee greater insight into running the clinic, the practice of family medicine and its impact on patient care, and where the future of family medicine lies by training future doctors.

As one of the core faculty members of the Family Medicine Residency Programme, Dr Zheng Mingli, Family Physician, Associate Consultation of Bukit Batok Polyclinic, trains and coaches resident doctors. Through sit-in clinic observation sessions, case-based discussions, video consultations and tutorials, she helps resident doctors crystallise and apply what they learnt from hospital postings to primary care.

Nonetheless, family doctors often face challenges at work, such as finding the time to upgrade their skills and knowledge amid busy schedules. However, this is where the support of colleagues at NHGP makes a big difference.

Dr Manojkumar elaborates, “Lifelong learning as a family physician can be a challenge but working in the public sector has provided me with the resources and time to continue my studies. Besides that, a balanced lifestyle and greater sense of job satisfaction both professionally and personally has pushed me to stay in NHGP.”

“The future for family medicine is bright if we can influence the younger generation of doctors to recognise and embrace the importance of family medicine.”

Dr Zheng Mingli
Family Physician, Associate Consultant at Bukit Batok Polyclinic

At the heart of the family

As the first touchpoint of our healthcare needs, the family doctor plays a pivotal role throughout every stage of our life. To celebrate World Family Doctor’s Day, we profile four NHGP family doctors to learn what makes their vocation so fulfilling.

Dr Manojkumar Amarlal Kharbanda
Family Physician

Dr Ruth Zheng Mingli
Family Physician, Associate Consultant

Dr Teo Hui Ying Valerie
Resident Physician

Dr Lee Kwang How
Residents Physician, Administrator, Teacher

Six Facets of Family Medicine (3Ps & 3Cs)

Comprehensiveness

Prevention

Continuity

Personal

Coordination

Primary (first contact)

About World Family Doctor Day

WONCA (World Organisation of Family Doctors) declared World Family Doctor Day in Cancun, Mexico in 2010. The first World Family Doctor Day was celebrated on 19 May 2010. It has been taken up with enthusiasm around the world and has given NHGP a chance to celebrate and recognise what family doctors do, and to highlight important issues and the work NHGP undertakes in supporting healthcare for all people in Singapore.
On the prevailing notion of “One can die, but cannot fall sick”

There is a saying in Singapore that “One can die, but cannot fall sick”. This saying is often quoted by patients with chronic illnesses who are concerned about their medical bills. In this issue, the editor speaks with NHGP’s Medical Social Worker Shawn Ang to find out more about the financial and community support available in Singapore and the roles of medical social workers in connecting needy patients to these resources.

What are the roles of a medical social worker?
A medical social worker assesses the psychosocial aspect of patients as part of overall disease management. He intervenes where necessary to connect patients and their families to resources and support in the community. The aim is to help improve the patient’s living conditions and his health outcomes. At NHGP, we have a dedicated team of medical social workers to do this.

What support or assistance does a patient usually need?
Very often, we [medical social workers] encounter elderly patients who refuse or delay treatments due to long-term cost concerns. Some are unsure of the financial assistance available. Some find it a hassle to go through the application process. Transport or mobility issues are also common, affecting the ability of patients to adhere to their medical appointments.

Can you name a few assistance/support schemes that are available?
At polyclinics, patients can use Medisave to reduce the out-of-pocket payments for 15 chronic diseases under the Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP), selected vaccinations and health screenings.

There is also Medifund. This is an endowment fund that serves as a safety net for those who, despite Medisave and MediShield coverage, cannot afford the subsidised bill charges.

ElderShield, introduced in September 2002, is an affordable severe disability insurance scheme designed to help Singaporeans meet their expenses incurred in the event of severe disability. Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs) with Medisave accounts are automatically covered under ElderShield at the age of 40.

There are other assistance schemes such as the Seniors’ Mobility and Enabling Fund and Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS).

The greatest concern that deters patients from seeking medical treatment is the potential cost. How can we allay such concerns?
We advise these patients to voice their concerns to our clinic staff who will then refer them to our financial counsellors and medical social workers. We listen to their concerns. Being able to speak in their dialects helps build trust and puts them at ease.

Our role is to help patients navigate the numerous schemes. After assessing their needs, we provide them with relevant information, and refer them to the services offered by relevant agencies, such as escort services for medical appointments.

In the past two years, have you seen any improvements in the assistance/support schemes available in Singapore’s healthcare system?
Yes. For instance, we recently saw the launch of Pioneer Generation Package in February 2014 that further supports the elderly with their medical expenses. Under that package, any eligible elderly person will receive an additional 50% off the net bill at polyclinics and specialist outpatient clinics. They will be placed on CHAS to enjoy additional subsidies. The Pioneer Generation Disability Assistance Scheme will provide cash assistance of $1200 a year to help those with moderate to severe functional disabilities.

We are also seeing ongoing enhancements to CHAS. For instance, starting in 2014, the previous qualifying age for CHAS (40 years old and above) was removed, and the annual value of residence criterion for households without income has been raised from $13,000 to $21,000. CHAS cardholders can now enjoy subsidies for selected screenings. The coverage for the number of chronic conditions covered under CHAS has also been increased.

What do you hope people to know more about social work?
Social work is a profession of “hope”. Medical social workers help patients to refocus and restore hope through listening, engaging, supporting, advocating, and caring. I feel privileged to be in a position of helping patients and their families.

To learn more about schemes and subsidies under MOH, visit: https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/costs_and_financing/schemes_subsidies.html