

S M C NEWS

Singapore Medical Council



MAY 2020 • ISSUE 14

www.smc.gov.sg

Thank You

Our Healthcare Heroes



Message from the President

Welcome to our 14th edition of the SMC News.

The beginning of 2020 has been a roller coaster ride for the global healthcare system and countries all over the world. We were caught by surprise by the speed of spread of the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus causing COVID-19.

The COVID-19 situation escalated into a worldwide pandemic crisis in a matter of weeks. In Singapore, we are heartened by our dedicated pool of doctors and healthcare workers who always placed the health and safety of the community as their top priority despite the demanding and rapidly changing situation we are in. Your professionalism is exemplary.

On behalf of SMC, we would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all doctors and healthcare workers who have gone all out to battle the virus. You have sacrificed selflessly and have put in much compassion, patience and care in serving every patient. You are the essential pillar of our healthcare system in ensuring that it remains strong during these unprecedented times.

In this issue, we share an article on SMC's new Registrar and Director of Medical Services, A/Prof Kenneth Mak, who is in the forefront of this battle with COVID-19 for healthcare. To get an insight on the ground, we also spoke to a fellow Council member, Dr Leong Choon Kit, who shared his experience battling COVID-19 as a General Practitioner.

A number of you have expressed concerns about fulfilling the CME requirements during the COVID-19 period. The SMC has addressed your concerns in two circulars to you and published on our website. We have summarised the changes for your easy reference in this newsletter.

We thank every one of you who has made it possible for Singapore to respond swiftly to the COVID-19 crisis from its onset and continues to work tirelessly. We will get through this difficult time together and emerge stronger.

Professor Chee Yam Cheng
President, Singapore Medical Council



Appreciation from SMC

21 February 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Just after New Year's day on 2 January 2020, doctors in Singapore were informed by the Ministry of Health (MOH) that the Wuhan Health Authorities had by 31 December 2019 identified a cluster of 27 cases of severe pneumonia and 7 were in critical condition.

On 21 January 2020, MOH updated all doctors that the pathogen was identified as a coronavirus (now named as COVID-19 by WHO). Two days later, on 23 January, MOH confirmed the first imported case in Singapore from Wuhan. From then on, more cases emerged and person to person spread occurred through the imported cases. Limited community spread was discovered when a few unlinked cases came down with the virus.

Our doctors, healthcare professionals and workers and non-medical colleagues are now in the midst of managing this outbreak in Singapore. COVID-19 has been exported to almost every continent, such is the ease of spread through air travel. We recognize and know the risks to every doctor and healthcare professional on the frontline managing ill patients.

Council members have in their messages to me appreciated our colleagues - our ID physicians, Public Health Physicians, Emergency Medicine Physicians, Microbiologists, Intensivists, Respiratory Physicians, Family Physicians, General Practitioners, our residents and medical officers on the frontlines and a host of other colleagues too many to be named. Along with our nurses, laboratory technicians, and many, many other healthcare professionals all are doing their part as one healthcare team for Singapore. We are grateful because of the sacrifices they make.

Each day we hope and pray that the efforts at containment of the outbreak in every country will be successful as early as possible. And we pause and reflect that we are fortunate to be prepared and that we are together a team in times like this. As a nation we are grateful to our leaders and our healthcare and non-healthcare workers in the multi-pronged fight against COVID-19.

It takes an entire nation to fight an outbreak. We appreciate our colleagues for their call to duty, their dedication to service and to make the health of their patients their first consideration. For all of us in the medical profession, this is a time to remember that this is the Physician's Pledge in action and that our hearts are together in this fight.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chee Yam Cheng'.

Chee Yam Cheng
President
Singapore Medical Council

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Featured Article

Introducing Our New Registrar



A/Prof Kenneth Mak is a familiar figure to many of us. As the Director of Medical Services (DMS) at the Ministry of Health (MOH), A/Prof Mak has been tasked with the heavy responsibility of leading the medical profession against the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. His task is of paramount importance in such unexpected times, leading and advising to keep the public informed on the ways to stay safe.

A/Prof Mak is a general surgeon, and was previously the Deputy Director of Medical Services (Health Services Group) in MOH from January 2016 before assuming the role as DMS-Designate from 16 December 2019 to 31 January 2020. He became the DMS from 1 February 2020.

A/Prof Mak had previously worked closely with the regional health systems and healthcare institutions in Singapore on care integration as well as on Singapore's long-term healthcare transformation strategy.



From left: A/Prof Kenneth Mak (DMS, MOH), Prof Chee Yam Cheng (President, SMC), Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon (Chairman, Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board) and A/Prof Benjamin Ong, former DMS, now Senior Vice President (Health Education & Resources) NUS at the 28 Sep 2019 SMC Physician's Pledge.



From left: Prof Fong Kok Yong (Chairman, Medical Board, SGH), A/Prof Koh Dow Rhon (Senior Consultant, NUH), A/Prof Chew Suok Kai (Senior Advisor, Office of the DMS, MOH), A/Prof Kenneth Mak (DMS, MOH) and A/Prof Benjamin Ong, former DMS and currently Senior Vice President (Health Education & Resources) NUS at the 28 Sep 2019 SMC Physician's Pledge.

Following his appointment as DMS, A/Prof Mak was concurrently appointed as Registrar of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) on 1 February 2020 as provided under section 4(1)(a) and 18(2) of the Medical Registration Act.

As Singapore continues to battle COVID-19, A/Prof Mak has been a familiar figure in the news media and to us all. In an interview with The Straits Times, 16 February 2020 '*Coronavirus: Top medical official's long hours in hot seat, barely a month in job*' he presented the challenges in managing this pandemic, to understand how the virus behaves and how it infects and spreads from person to person in the community.

A/Prof Mak's dedication and leadership has encouraged all of us as we together fight this battle.

We continue to look forward to A/Prof Mak's wisdom and guidance as Registrar of SMC.

Featured Article

Called to Serve — COVID-19 Experience of a GP

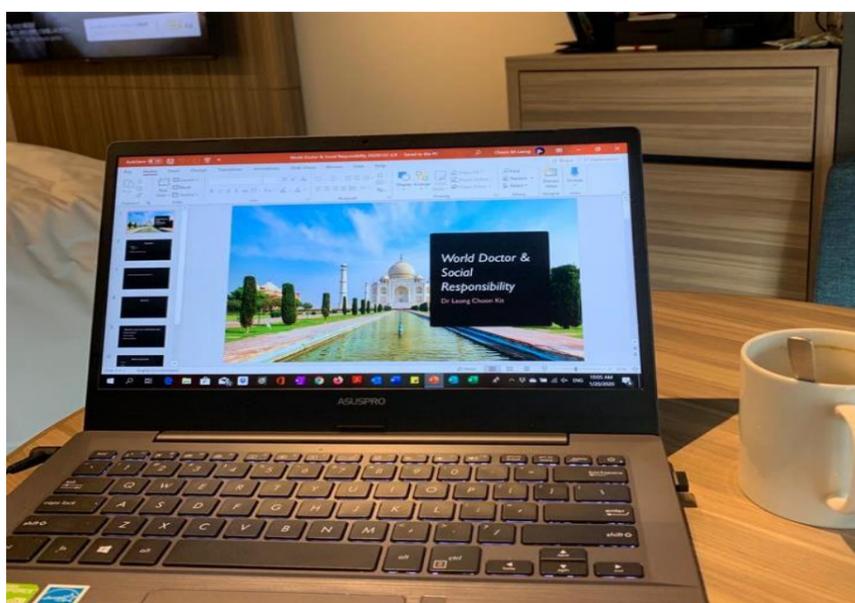
Contributed by Dr Leong Choon Kit, Family Physician



Dr Leong Choon Kit is a SMC member currently serving his 3rd term as an elected member. Armed with decades of experience as a general practitioner (GP), Dr Leong shared with us how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the ground.

Flashbacks

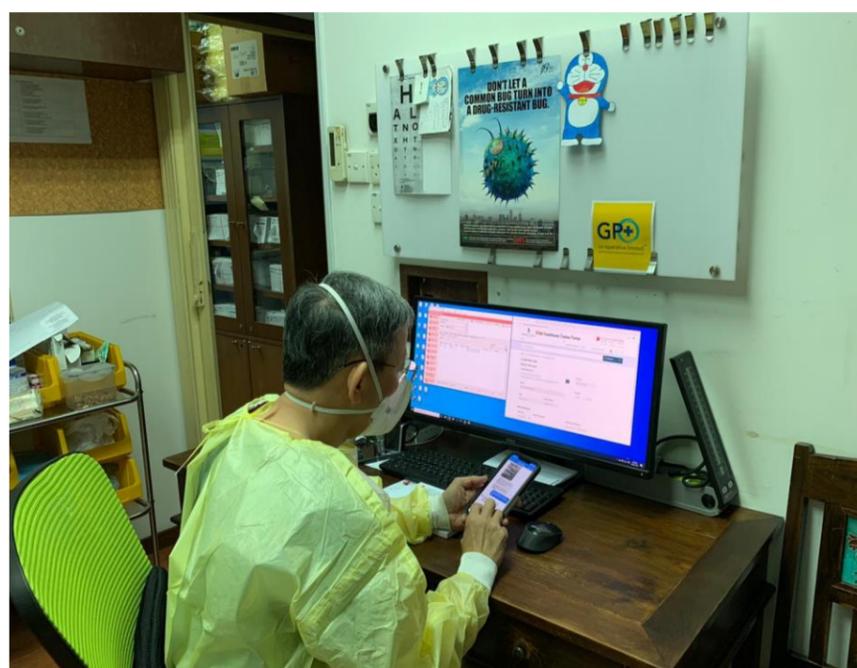
Early January this year, I took a winter retreat in Osaka. Just when I finally had the opportunity to reflect on the eventful action-packed 2019, news broke out about the viral outbreak in China. As I watched the news unfold on the TV from the comfort of my warm hotel room, many thoughts rushed through my mind.



Dr Leong first came to know about the pandemic while on a trip to Osaka last winter.

The feeling was surreal. My heart went out to the long queues of people lining up and battling the cold winter at the hospitals' emergency departments all over the city in China. I was reminded once again of my experience seeing patients there.

I began to have flashback of SARS in 2003 when I just started my own GP practice. Very quickly, I started to jot down a long list of things that needed to be done.



Dr Leong suited up in Personal Protection Equipment at his clinic.

Mental Stress

COVID-19 landed in Singapore shortly before I returned from my retreat. I started noticing many GPs in our chat groups posting comments that did not sound like their usual selves. For those whom I was more acquainted with, I decided to check on them privately.

Many of us suffered from varying degrees of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) after getting updates from COVID-19 related news and videos from China.

For the younger doctors, they were stressed by the uncertainty and the unknown. They were also stressed by the lack of credible news sources.

For those SARS-veteran GPs, many remembered clearly those who fell to SARS. The memory was still very vivid. It was as if SARS happened just yesterday.

"Choon Kit, we are all going to die this time. Look at the thousands who just fall while walking." A few of my classmates WhatsApped or called me.



Campaigns from GP+ Co-operative providing public educational messages.

Taking Action

I started to put the things that needed to be done into action.

My first task was to activate the online shop of our newly set up **GP+ Co-operative (Co-op)** to help fellow colleagues procure Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). Our very lean Co-op staff team took the initiative to start sourcing from overseas while anticipating a surge in pricing, a trend we learnt at every outbreak.

Our next task was to ensure our Co-op GPs were mentally ready and resilient enough to go through this crisis. We did this by activating our group of Co-op psychologists from our mental health eco-system. Together with some psychologists outside the Co-op, we manned a hotline for stressed out Healthcare Workers (HCWs).



2 likes

gpplus.coop These are the encouragement wordings and appreciation from the... more

Appreciation and encouragement for GPs.

“

.... We are certainly not the first or frontline the public touted us to be.

We need to humbly bring the fight upstream. We need every citizen to keep themselves healthy so that we can concentrate on looking after those who have fallen.

”

I remembered very clearly that many GPs worked hard and put their lives on the line every day to work through SARS. No GPs were acknowledged for their contribution in SARS till this day. This remained a low point for many of us.

To uplift and rally the GPs, I decided to start a string of encouraging activities to show our appreciation to the GPs.

My nursing friend from my clinic, Lanie, started soliciting for volunteer drivers within her network to help ferry off-duty nurses and doctors.

We also gathered our friends in the education profession to engage students and show encouragement to HCWs and GPs in their classes or school projects.

Another little project we did at the beginning of the outbreak was the public messaging on personal hygiene, hand washing and the correct use of surgical masks. We made use of the Co-op TVs in our clinics as well as social media to share these health tips. We knew that sometimes messages from a non-governmental group could be more effective for some of our population and supplemented the government's efforts in containing the spread of the virus.



Procurement support to fellow GPs.

Waiting for PHPC activation, without PPEs

When we were busy getting our clinics ready for the activation of Public Health Preparedness Clinics (PHPCs), I remembered that half of our GPs were without PPE support.

It started off as I was discussing some teaching materials with one of my old Family Medicine professors. When I found out he was working without PPE, it dawned on me that there were quite a few of us who needed help.

So I gathered what I have bought earlier, split a few and distributed some. I was glad that even non-PHPC clinics have access to PPE albeit at a small cost.



Procurement support to fellow GPs.

Link to MOH Policies and Schemes

Many doctors on the ground were totally confused and lost. At the Primary Care Network (PCN) and Co-op level, we tried our best to answer every query. And at times, when we did not have any answers, we became the bridge between the Ministry of Health (MOH), Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and the GPs.

The group of PCN leads also served as a sounding board for some of the measures and policies MOH was considering or trying to roll out. I must confess that I have also suffered from the COVID-19 overload and fatigue.

When the DORSCON level was raised to Orange, one of the schemes MOH rolled out was the Flu Subsidies Scheme (FSS). Being a subsidized care, the scheme hopes to pick up more cases before they spread to the community.

The GP leaders at the Co-op noticed that the foreign workers were noticeably missed out. Our concern then was that they might be the weakest link. The impetus to roll out our version of the FSS was when a foreign worker from Bangladesh was infected.

Our Co-op did not have any financial muscle to run a scheme like that. But we appealed to the hearts of our Co-op members to sacrifice their earnings and cap their fees at SGD\$40 regardless of their cost. Many of us lost income doing so but we were happy to help. We knew we have played a small part to help the foreign workers by easing their financial burden.

The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword

After having gone through a few disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies, we know that mental health and public confidence are the most critical.

Gov.sg has set up a comprehensive corporate communication strategy and we have benefitted from the timely public announcements on measures and updates.

Our friends in public media have also played a big part in instilling public confidence as well as highlighting some ground issues to doctors and MOH.

"The pen is mightier than the sword." I posted this on my Facebook as a tribute and encouragement to my reporter and journalist friends.

We are all in it together. Although some of us may not be part of the staff or officials from MOH, but we help by fronting some of the queries on the ground. This is the least we can and should do.

Fighting On...

The war against COVID-19 is a global war, a worldwide war. We might have won a few battles but we are still far from winning the war. There is a lot to be done and we really need all hands on deck to overcome the virus.

HCWs including GPs must realise that we are the last line of defence in this fight. We are certainly not the first or frontline the public touted us to be.

We need to humbly bring the fight upstream. We need every citizen to keep themselves healthy so that we can concentrate on looking after those who have fallen.

This is a timely reminder for myself and my fellow medical colleagues that we choose to be doctors for a time like this.



Dr Leong at his clinic.

Matters to Note

SMC Election Reminder

WHO MUST VOTE? ^[1]

- All fully registered medical practitioners resident in Singapore; and
- Holding a valid Practising Certificate (PC)

WHEN TO VOTE?

Tuesday, 5 May 2020 (8.00am) to Tuesday, 19 May 2020 (11.59pm)

HOW TO VOTE?

Login to the Professional Registration System (PRS) using your SingPass at the SMC Website (<https://www.smc.gov.sg>) or scan the QR code below:



WHO TO VOTE FOR?

There will be 12 candidates standing for the election to fill seven (7) vacancies in the SMC. The Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of all 12 candidates can be viewed on the PRS.

WHAT IF A DOCTOR FAILS TO VOTE? ^[2]

The doctor will not be entitled to apply for a PC unless he/she:

- a) satisfies the Registrar that he/she had a good and sufficient reason; or
- b) pays to SMC a penalty of \$500

HOW TO SEEK ASSISTANCE?

Email us at SMC_election@spb.gov.sg

^[1] Medical Registration Act s6(1)

^[2] Medical Registration Act s6(2); Medical Registration Regulations s10(2)



Fulfilling Continuing Medical Education (CME) Requirements

Doctors may refer to the following provisions on how they may fulfil their CME requirements during DORSCON Orange.

1. Accumulate CME points via online platforms

- CME points can be obtained by reading online refereed medical journals and participating in online distance-learning programmes. Doctors are also encouraged to participate in CME sessions through Webinars organised by the Academy of Medicine Singapore, College of Family Physicians Singapore and Singapore Medical Association.

2. CME cap raised for Cat 3A Activities

- For doctors whose practising certificates (PCs) are expiring on 31 December 2020 or 2021, the CME cap for Cat 3A is raised from **10 to 20 CME points** ^[1].
- With the raised cap, doctors can fulfil their CME requirements by participating in Cat 3A and Cat 3B activities without further need for acquiring CME points from other categories. For example, doctors may accrue 50 CME points by reading 20 articles (Cat 3A) and completing 30 online assessments (Cat 3B).
- Please refer to Table 1 for the CME caps for the various categories of activities.

Table 1: Categories of CME and Cap of CME points

Category	Description	Cap of CME points for the qualifying period
Cat 1A	Pre-established programmes held in restructured hospitals, institutions	No cap
Cat 1B	Local events (e.g. workshops, scientific meetings, conferences)	No cap
Cat 1C	Overseas events (e.g. workshops, scientific meetings, conferences)	No cap
Cat 2	Publications / Editorial Work / Presentation of Original paper or poster	40
Cat 3A	Self-study (e.g. reading of refereed journals listed in PubMed)	20 (previously 10)
Cat 3B	Accredited distance-learning programmes with verifiable self-assessment	36

3. Awarding of core points for COVID-19 related CME activities

- For doctors whose practising certificates (PCs) are expiring on 31 December 2020 or 2021, **COVID-19 related CME activities will be considered core points.**
 - Previously awarded non-core points for Cat 3A and 3B claims for COVID-19 related CME activities can be converted to core points if the doctor has insufficient core points 6 months before PC expires.
 - For doctors who have difficulty in meeting core points requirements by 31 December 2020, please email SMC at SMC_cme@spb.gov.sg from 1 July 2020 onwards to convert your non-core points to core points.

^[1] The CME points referred above apply to doctors holding a 2-year PC. For doctors holding a 1-year PC, the CME points will correspondingly be halved

Feedback

For feedback and comments, please contact us at SMC@spb.gov.sg

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