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The heart of service

Helping others goes beyond offering medical assistance, as family physician Dr Chua Ying Xian realises

ESTHER TEO

THERE is no secret to becoming a good doctor, says Dr Chua Ying Xian, a family physician at Pioneer Polyclinic.

"It's about apprenticeship and being willing to learn and serve with humility. But one thing's for sure — it will leave you with a sense of fulfilment," he adds.

The 31-year-old has been volunteering in his personal capacity as a healthcare professional on overseas humanitarian and medical education trips to countries such as China, India, Nepal, the Philippines and Myanmar for the past decade.

"Serving others helps us learn more about them — not just in the domain of health but also how social dynamics, economic hardships, environmental risks and public healthcare infrastructures are fundamental in the care of a patient," he says.

Enhanced care

Dr Chua holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, a Master of Public Health and a Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine from the National University of Singapore. He received the qualifications in 2010, 2015 and 2016 respectively.

He has been working in the polyclinics for three years and is currently a family physician at Pioneer Polyclinic, a part of the National University Polyclinics group.

The group comprises six polyclinics in the western region of Singapore and provides subsidised outpatient medical care.

The focus is on health promotion and disease prevention, early and accurate diagnosis, disease management through physician-led team-based care as well as the enhancement of the capability of Family Medicine through research and teaching.

Dr Chua starts his day at the polyclinic at 8am, and knocks off by 4.30pm on weekdays and 12.30pm on Saturdays.

Sometimes he stays back with the other clinical staff till about 6pm to attend to all the patients for the day, and to complete administrative work such as medical reports and quality improvement meetings.

While most of Mr Chua's patient consults are clinic-based, his team also handles emergencies, providing simple procedures ranging from paediatric developmental surveillance and assessment, to preventive healthcare and acute management such as incision and drainage of infection and simple suturing.

The clinic represents an enhanced care model — Dr Chua works closely with nursing, allied health and ancillary colleagues in "teamlets" to provide coordinated and holistic care for patients.

A teamlet comprises two doctors, a care manager (who is a nursing professional) and a care coordinator to take care of a regular pool of patients who require chronic follow-up and health maintenance.

Says Dr Chua: "In today's healthcare landscape, a doctor's role is evolving as we shift from practising hierarchal medicine to synergising patient partnerships.

"As primary care providers, we work hand-in-hand with our specialist partners to support patients in self-management and continuity of care, and promote disease prevention."

More than just a job

It was a combination of factors that led Dr Chua to pursue a career as a family physician.

"The wide range of issues that's brought forth by patients of all ages at our polyclinic can be medical, social, or psychological. There's never a boring day," Dr Chua says.

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>
> DR CHUA YING XIAN
> family physician
> Pioneer Polyclinic

His biggest challenge is mastering effective communication — between doctors and patients; or even with fellow doctors, nurses, coordinators and operation executives.

Pulling all the threads together is important to provide enhanced care for patients.

He recalls an incident when he realised that an elderly patient defaulted on his renal specialist review many times because he was working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Hence, the patient, who was actually suffering from late stage kidney disease, could not find time for his review.

Dr Chua only found out about this after speaking with the patient's wife who was also on regular follow-ups with his teamlet.

After a consultation with their medical social worker, the team linked up with his kidney specialist's case manager and managed to get the family financial aid.

Knowing there is always someone else whom he can help, Dr Chua feels a strong desire to improve in the way he can assist others in need.

"Sometimes it may not be medical help; it could just be as simple as offering a listening ear to a chronic patient who has recently lost his job," he explains.

While he does not have a ready answer all the time, he tries his best to learn from his patients and peers, and works with them to derive an appropriate care plan.

Says Dr Chua: "A healthcare leader is now not just an academician or diagnostician, but more of a care integrator, leveraging on technological advances to help individuals with differing healthcare needs.

"We need to be willing to push new frontiers in healthcare."

Dr Chua deals with a wide range of issues — medical, social and psychological — at the polyclinic. PHOTO: TED CHEN

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