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EMERGENCY!: Reflections of a First-Time Programme Director, Dr Kenneth Heng



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Remembering A/Prof Vijayan Appasamy (1953-2015): My Teacher, Mentor and Inspiration

HAPPENINGS



Helping a Learner in Difficulty

  **NHGEducation**

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EMERGENCY!: Reflections of a First-Time Programme Director, Dr Kenneth Heng

In this first of a four-part series, Reflections of a first-time Programme Director (PD), we chatted with the inaugural Programme Director of the NHG Emergency Medicine (EM) Residency Programme, Dr Kenneth Heng, on his initial reaction, reflections and experience as one of the first five PDs in NHG Residency.



Hi Dr Heng, who or how were you approached to be the programme director (PD) for NHG EM Residency Programme?

I was approached by A/Prof Tham Kum Ying (she was associate dean then) to be PD for EM.

What was your initial reaction?

I was like the 'Duracell' Bunny - bring it on! (laughs)
I was an immediate convert because I believe that this programme would ensure quality post-graduate EM education, and produce a constant pipeline of specialists to our department – an issue which had always been a bugbear.

What were some of the tense moments/challenges that you encountered during your time as a first-time PD?

Because I work in one of the busiest A&E departments in Singapore, nothing else feels tense (laughs).

Some of the challenges included unfamiliarity with all the new GME (Graduate Medical Education) terms; juggling between the expectations of MOH (Ministry of Health), Sponsoring Institutions, Residency Advisory Committee and ACGME-I (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education International) during the initial stage of implementation; the culture shock faced by the HOD (head of department) and other department staff as they were first exposed to issues like duty hours (gasp!), which required delicate handling; and providing 'pastoral' care for the residents. Being parent, disciplinarian and Aunt Agony does not come naturally to me (laughs).

How did you overcome it?

NHG Residency office pre-empted the difficulties we would face, and co-organised various faculty development programmes with the Harvard Macy Institute (HMI), which rapidly equipped us with the latest in medical education, which hitherto consisted of the grand total of 'see one, do one, teach one'.

I psyched myself to be ready for constant change. Adapt and try not to get stressed about it. Also one of the most valuable lessons introduced to us from the HMI programme was about 'change management'. The book "Our Iceberg is Melting" had lots of practical, helpful tips.



The first five PDs (third from left): Dr Chuah Khoon Leong, Late A/Prof Vijayan Appasamy, Dr Kenneth Heng, A/Prof Koh Nien Yue, and A/Prof Chiam Peak Chiang, at the 2010 NHG-AHPL Residency Career Symposium

Share with us some of the most memorable or exciting moments as PD?

We were conscious that we were the pioneers in this ground-breaking endeavour. There was strong camaraderie amongst the DIO (designated institutional official), PDs, PCs (programme coordinators) and GME staff. It felt like we were 'in this together'. We felt incredibly supported and the team work was fantastic.

What was your most proud achievement as a PD?

It felt like I was walking around gravid with multiple gestations, so the 'birth' of the first graduates after this 5 year-long gestation was one of my (our) proudest achievements. I also cherished interacting with, teaching and learning from the fine young men and women as they matured from residents to become colleagues.

We understand that the late A/Prof Appasamy Vijayan was part of the first five PDs in NHG Residency. Share with us some of the most memorable moments that you had with him.

My earliest memory of A/Prof V was assisting him in an emergency laparotomy when he was my registrar. We then became colleagues and collaborators in our GME journey.

I remember him lugging a telescope to do star-gazing on one of our education retreats in Batam. He was quirky that way (laughs), but always a jovial, sensible, pragmatic voice at meetings and a good friend.

What's the advice you would give to the current team of PDs?

I wish them all the best and hopefully it will build on the foundations we have laid, with the interest of our trainees always a top priority.



< Dr Heng (centre) with the first batch of Masters of Health Professions Education graduates

Dr Kenneth Heng was the programme director of the NHG Emergency Medicine Residency Programme for the first seven years. He is currently a clinical core faculty member, and a senior consultant at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital "basement dungeon".

Remembering A/Prof Vijayan Appasamy (1953-2015): My Teacher, Mentor and Inspiration

By Dr Joseph Lo

On 19 March 2020, it will be the 5th anniversary since the passing of Associate Professor Vijayan Appasamy, or affectionately known as “Prof V”.

Prof V led an illustrious medical career. He served in the Singapore Armed Forces Naval Diving Unit as a lieutenant colonel, made a mid-career switch to general surgery, obtained his double Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS), specialised in trauma and acute care surgery in 1998, and subsequently established the Trauma Service at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) with his “partner-in-crime” Associate Professor Chiu Ming Terk, which gained international recognition for being a training centre for Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) course.



< Always game enough! Here with Dr Tan Ming Yuan (right)

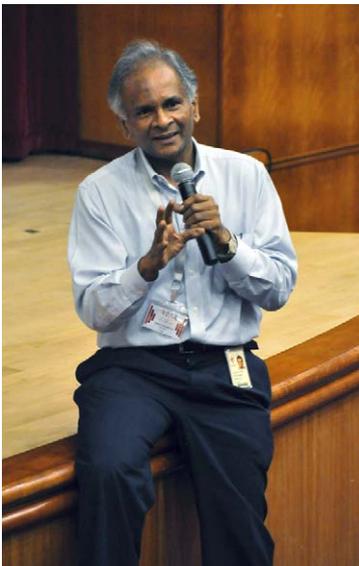
And at the time of his passing, Prof V was the president-elect of the College of Surgeons, Singapore. In fact, it is said that Prof V was a man so honoured, and amazing that the initials after his name are longer than the name itself!

Yet, despite his achievements and multiple accolades, Prof V was a humble man and never distant to his trainees. When surgical training shifted to the residency system in 2010, Prof V, as the inaugural programme director of the NHG General Surgery (GS) Residency Programme, brought the first batch of residents (all eight of us together with two programme coordinators) to the old SAF Yacht Club Tanah Merah Clubhouse to enjoy a meal of fish and chips in the balmy sea-breeze, where he patiently explained to us what to expect in the new training system.

During the course of my residency training, Prof V would often catch us along corridors and at *kopitiam* to ask how are we doing. He would reach out to every resident, invite us to his house for weekend dinners and impromptu jamming sessions on his cajon box drum, and always take time off his busy schedule to attend residency outings. In fact, Prof V was always game enough for every situation, photo opportunity, and always with a big smile!



(Right): Late A/Prof V, always ready to teach, mentor and inspire



Being an avid educator, Prof V utilised every single opportunity available to teach. During ward rounds, he would often link patient's clinical condition with potential ABSITE (American Board of Surgery In-Training Examination) questions and quizzed us on it. Even at 2am, when he returned for trauma-related emergency operations, he would leverage on the situation and drill home a learning point. Once, I was performing an emergency trauma splenectomy with him, and he began teaching us all the various surgical options and techniques of spleen-preserving versus splenectomy. Education was his passion, and his mission was not only to teach and mentor us, but more importantly, to inspire us to improve in the field of surgery.

It has been 10 years since the commencement of the GS residency programme. As the inaugural GS resident, chief resident and president of the Resident Council, I am thankful for the many opportunities which Prof V had given me. Although he did not manage to witness my GS residency graduation in June 2015, and passing of my exit exams in August 2015, I am eternally grateful to Prof V for being my teacher, mentor and inspiration.

Thank you Prof V, your memory lives on.



Dr Joseph Lo (right) receiving the Special Recognition Award from former NUS Medicine Dean A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan in 2017



In his office drawer is Prof V's 'black-tag', of which he holds dearly to.

Dr Joseph Lo was the first graduate from the NHG General Surgery Residency Programme, and is currently a consultant with Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Helping a Learner in Difficulty

How do you identify a learner in difficulty? What are the possible indicators of a learner struggling at work due to clinical performance, attitude, or difficulty in adjustment? What are some strategies and policies to support a supervisor managing a learner in difficulty? 29 National Healthcare Group (NHG) educators from Allied Health, Nursing and Pharmacy came together on 21 November last year to discuss and share their experiences at the inaugural run of “The Learners in Difficulty” workshop organised by NHG College.

The half-day workshop led by course director, Ms Xanthe Chua, an advanced practice nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), was designed to equip educators with strategies to support learners and trainees in difficulty. During the highly interactive and engaging session, facilitators and participants discussed through hands-on scenarios and explored practical diagnostic approaches such as the 'DICED' framework to help them manage learners facing difficulty.

'DICED' is the acronym for **D**ocument everything, **I**dentify early, **C**larify facts and corroborative history, **E**xplore cause(s), and **D**iagnose and remediate.

The participants found the scenarios and strategies shared relevant and pragmatic.

“The case studies were great and very beneficial,” said one participant.

“I loved the real life case studies,” shared another.



Ms Chua and her facilitators (from left), Dr Faith Chia (Designated Institutional Official, NHG Residency), Ms Jamie Lim (Assistant Director of Nursing, TTSH), and Ms Law Hwa Lin [Principal Pharmacist (Specialist), TTSH]



Course director, Ms Xanthe Chua, facilitating a case study.



< Participants of the inaugural run of “The Learners in Difficulty” workshop.

For the list of education and faculty development programmes offered by NHG College, visit <https://corp.nhg.com.sg/College/Pages/Programmes.aspx>