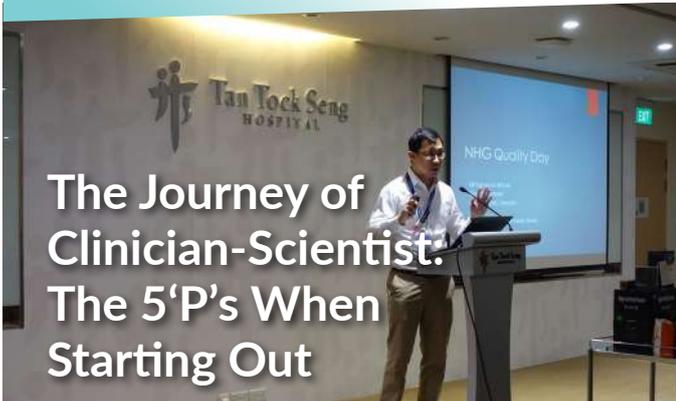


IN FOCUS



The Journey of Clinician-Scientist:
The 5'P's When Starting Out

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FACE TO FACE



2020 National Outstanding Clinician-Scientist Resident Awardee

The Heart of Healthcare Delivery –
Conversations that Matter



Ownership, Motivation, Resilience –
What's the Link?

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NHG EDUCATION

The Journey of Clinician-Scientist: The 5'P's When Starting Out

By Dr Bryan Tan



Dr Tan presenting at the 2018 NHG Orthopaedic Surgery Residency Quality Day

The Unwitting Researcher

As a medical student and subsequently as a young resident in Orthopaedic Surgery, research was far from my mind. My primary aim was to become a highly competent and proficient surgeon. However, early in senior residency, I found myself enrolled into the NHG Clinician Scientist Preparatory Programme (CSPP), and was inadvertently thrust into a world of academia and research. While I recognised that research is an integral part in any clinician's practice to critically appraise new evidence in the medical field which is continually and rapidly evolving, it was something entirely different pursuing research as a full-time clinician-scientist (CS). Ultimately, it was the unique opportunity to challenge the status quo and potentially improve clinical practice (on a larger scale) through my interest in health services research that drew me into the CS track full time and my decision to pursue a PhD.

As I look back on my journey as a CS, which is still very much in its infancy, there are several key ingredients that have stood out for me that I hope would help any aspiring CS looking to start this journey. I call it the 5'P's.



Dr Tan receiving the first prize award from judge, Mr Bernard Wong

► The 5'P's

The 1st 'P' - PROJECT

Start with an idea that fulfils a need in your daily clinical practice. I believe clinicians are in an ideal position to identify important gaps in clinical practice. It does not matter how small or big the project may seem to be, take the first step and you will be surprised how far a simple idea can go. As Gandhi once said, "Be the change you want to see in the world". At the end of the day, it is our patients who will ultimately benefit from improvements in clinical care, and a cause that lies close to your heart fuels you to see it through.

The 2nd 'P' - PEOPLE

Research is a team sport and nobody can do it alone. When you are first starting out, you need good mentors to guide you and point you in the right direction. I have been incredibly blessed in that aspect, having research mentors like Professors Ernest Kwek, Josip Car, Julian Thumboo, and Dr Heng Bee Hoon. Most importantly, do not be afraid to ask for help. Many of my mentors were people whom I approached out of the blue, and were kind enough to take me under their wing and share their wealth of experience with me.

I have also learnt along the way that everyone, no matter how senior or junior, brings something to the table and can contribute in very tangible ways. As I look back on my journey thus far, I'm astounded and humbled by the sheer number of people who have helped me, sometimes from places where I least expected. For this, I am eternally grateful.

The 3rd 'P' - PASSION

"If you follow your passion, you'll never work a day in your life" is something that I feel is very true in research, wherein the journey can be long and arduous. Linked very closely to passion is another P – Perseverance. The CONNACT study (which eventually became my PhD project) started in 2017 with a simple idea. After spending months bringing together relevant stakeholders, designing the programme, pitching the idea to several HODs (heads of department)

and senior leaders, and applying for several research grants (many unsuccessful), it was only much later in end 2019 that we kicked off our first pilot trial. And it was almost four years later before we finally finished the one-year follow ups for all 133 trial participants. In research, you will often face rejection and the journey may feel long but you should never give up on a project that you believe in.

The 4th 'P' - PROFICIENCY

Similar to how one would hone their skills to become an excellent clinician, there is a need to develop proficiency and credibility as a researcher. During the CSPP, I attended several research courses such as biostatistics, study design and questionnaire design that provided me a solid foundation in research methodology. Through my PhD course, I received the opportunity to dive deeper into my area of interest, and apply things that I have learnt through my project.

The talent development division of the NHG Research Development Office has been working hard to provide the necessary support by linking aspiring CS up with training and mentorship opportunities, identifying seed funding possibilities and mapping out a viable career path. They have been instrumental in supporting me as I pursue this path, and I would encourage anyone who is interested to approach them.

The 5th 'P' - PREVAILING WIND

The prevailing wind is not really a key ingredient but something very useful for all CS to be aware of, particularly when looking for institutional and funding support. Take note of where the national, cluster and hospital research priorities lie and see how you can match your interest to these research priorities. This would help your project stand a better chance of getting supported and funded.

I do hope these "P"s would be helpful for any aspiring CS and I wish each and every one of you all the best as you embark on this meaningful journey.



Dr Bryan Tan is an Associate Consultant in Orthopaedic Surgery at the Woodlands Health Campus, and a Clinician-Scientist. He is currently in his 2nd year PhD with Nanyang Technological University Lee Kong Chian Medicine with his project on the Collaborative Model of Care between Orthopaedics and Allied Healthcare Professional Trial (CONNACT). Dr Tan's research interests are in musculoskeletal health, community-based interventions, public health, health services research and implementation science. As a clinician-scientist, Dr Tan hopes to be a bridge between clinicians, researchers, administrators and policy-makers to help transform musculoskeletal care in Singapore.

Dr Xu Chuanhui Awarded 2020 National Outstanding Clinician-Scientist Resident Award

Dr Xu Chuanhui, a second-year senior resident with the NHG Rheumatology Residency Programme (clinician-scientist track) received the 2020 National Outstanding Clinician-Scientist Resident Award in April 2021. We spoke to Dr Xu about his win, and gained insight into his journey as a resident on the clinician-scientist track.

1. Dr Xu congratulations on receiving this award!

Thank you very much!

2. Can you share with us what are your thoughts on receiving this award?

I am grateful for the support from the TTSH Department of Rheumatology, Allergy and Immunology, and my mentor Dr Leong Khai Pang. I could not have started research, or successfully applied for grants without his or the department's support.

It is also very encouraging to receive this award, and continue my journey in research.

3. What prompted you to embark on this clinician-scientist (CS) route?

I have always been interested in research since I was in medical school. And as a medical practitioner, research helps me understand more about the disease, and address the unmet needs of patients. It means a lot for patients even if it is only a small step.

4. What are some of the challenges and what is the most gratifying part of being a CS?

The most challenging part is time management. As a senior resident, it is stressful for inpatient and outpatient clinical service, blue letter consultations, night duties, and getting prepared for exams. Hence, it is important to find a way to manage your time and energy, to balance clinical work, research and family life.

The most gratifying part is embarking in an unknown area, and to learn from other experts in this field or area that you are venturing into. The game is never ending.

5. What is your advice for fellow residents who are sitting on the fence or contemplating whether they should embark on the CS route?

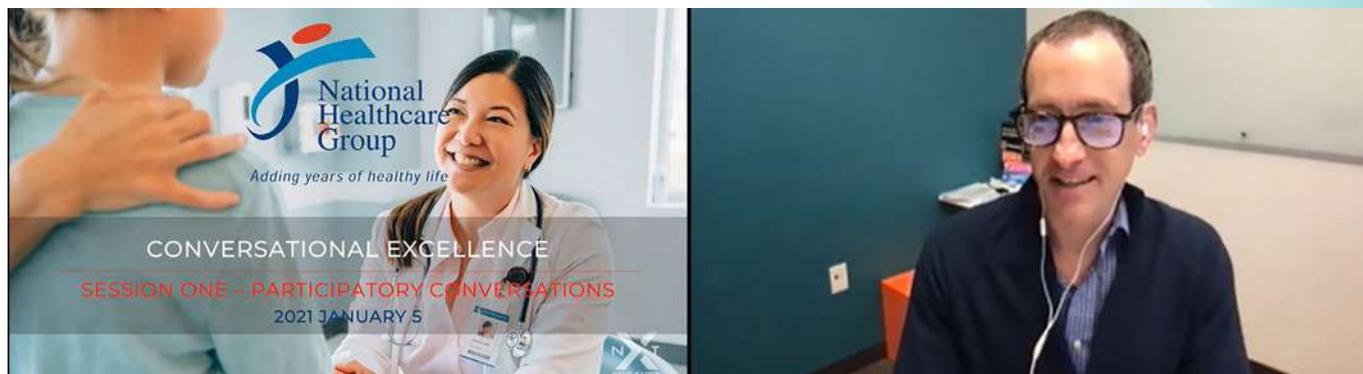
Do think carefully before embarking on this route, it is really taking the road less travelled. It is rewarding if you enjoy intellectual challenges, exploring uncharted areas, and filling up the gaps of clinical care for patients.

It is also helpful to talk to someone who is on the track, or you can join them to work on some projects. You will gain better clarity and help you with making that decision.



Dr Xu Chuanhui studied medicine at Peking University (China) and finished his Ph.D. in University of Groningen (the Netherlands). He is currently a second year senior resident in Rheumatology (clinician-scientist track). His current project focus mainly on cardiovascular comorbidities in patients with rheumatic diseases.

The Heart of Healthcare Delivery – Conversations that Matter



Professional Certified Coach, Mr Marc Smith Sacks (right), was invited to share his expertise on participatory conversations.

Research has demonstrated that establishing good communication practices plays an instrumental role in enhancing clinical performance, improving patient safety, and creating a more positive patient experience.

In order to engage and empower patients to take more ownership of their own health, healthcare professionals must also shift their approach to patient communications, from one that is about “What’s the matter with you?” to one that is more inclusive and participatory – “What matters to you?”.

Mr Marc Smith Sacks, a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coach Federation was invited by National Healthcare Group (NHG) College to share his expertise in participatory conversations with 42 NHG clinical educators, trainers and facilitators at the Conversational Excellence Train-the-Trainer Programme, in January this year.

Over the five half-day Zoom sessions, Mr Sacks introduced different mental models, tools, and illustrative frameworks for participatory conversations. He also demonstrated how to apply these concepts to communication that engages and promotes participation.

Co-developed by NHG and Mr Sacks, the curriculum included a mix of lectures, discussions, sharing of best practices, and role play scenarios. The role-play scenarios covered topics highly pertinent in today’s patient communications such as open disclosure, managing upset patients and family members, and end-of-life discussions.

Participants also had the opportunity to practice the teach-back method – a method to ensure that the patient understands the medical information being explained to them. Grouped in multi-disciplinary teams, they took turns to teach each other, discuss and provide feedback to one another.

It was hoped that through these sessions, participants would internalise the various concepts, tools, and frameworks shared, and adapt them as part of their day-to-day practice, and their own patient communication training back at their workplace and institutions.



Participants concluded the workshops with a check-in and reflection session.

Residents Engagement and Leadership Development (REAL) series:

Ownership, Motivation, Resilience - What's the Link?

By Avery Tong



Dr Soh Jian Yi, sharing about The Ownership Cycle on the REAL series.

Some of the hot topics discussed in business, education, and parenting include self-motivation, stress, resilience. Translating theories about human behaviour and drive that may explain how these issues arise into practical teaching is a challenge. Dr Soh Jian Yi, Senior Consultant (Division of Allergy, Immunology and Rheumatology; Department of Paediatrics, National University Hospital), was invited to share on the Residents Engagement and Leadership Development (REAL) series on 23 March 2021, on the topic of The Ownership Cycle, and how it shows the way forward.

The Ownership Cycle is a behavioural cycle that Dr Soh introduced. Its strength lies in the three simple, yet effective, questions anyone can ask themselves at any time:

- Do you own your reality?
- Do you own your communication in reality?
- Do you own your learning in reality?

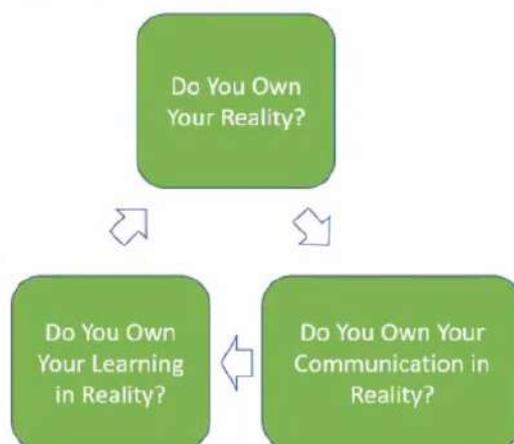
He shared some lessons for individuals and demonstrated how to cultivate a culture that fosters these qualities.

This concept of The Ownership Cycle emphasised the way one should be looking at an event, particularly those that are bad or upsetting. With the anchoring of these questions, the participants will be forced to own the observations and reality, not what they choose to ignore or imagine. This cycle ensures that the participant is always grounded in reality and always learning all about it. "I believe this is probably the secret behind what some people would call 'super speed learning,'" shared Dr Soh.

These questions matter because everyone goes through events in life, consisting of good and bad events, and the questions address exactly what everyone encounters, in the exact sequence our minds and hearts work. How we handle these events and learn (well or badly) from them, often is subconscious. The questions force us to face those events and consciously choose to react appropriately and learn maximally from them.

Without these steps, the very same problems tend to crop up repeated, especially when our subconscious choices do not solve the problems from unhappy events nor teach us how to prevent them recurring.

The Ownership Cycle



The key to this subconscious Cycle is what the person's answer is to these questions: Yes, or No?

By consciously referring to the questions of The Ownership Cycle, one will be able to identify the two common themes: ownership, and reality. In order to succeed in reality, one must accept and pay full attention to reality. Applying The Ownership Cycle to an individual's life includes knowing how and when to get help if there are major deficits, the need to notice, and step up to take action, and the key to this is resilience.

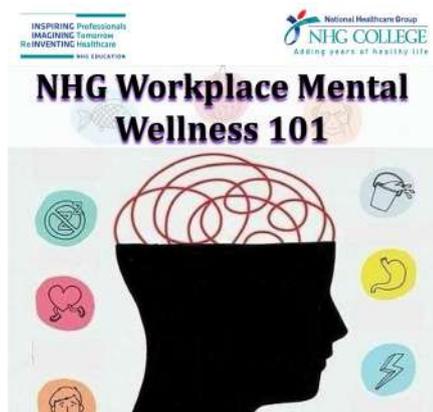
"What separates the occasional legend from everyone else? Part of it is resilience," said Dr Soh. Resilient people have three common characteristics - they accept reality, they have a deep belief that life is meaningful, and they have an uncanny ability to improvise. While it is easy to talk about these characteristics, developing them is a long journey in itself. Through this session, Dr Soh aimed to reach out to every participant and show how everyone can develop these characteristics.

Before concluding the session, Dr Soh introduced five common themes which serves as a framework for the participants to cultivate and hone their own resilience.

The five themes are:

- an individual's responsibility to take control
- an individual's reaction is telling of their ownership
- an individual's ownership mirrors their learning
- an individual's source of motivation, resilience and contentment in life is tied to their ownership of their life's events
- individuals make up the group, environment and culture, which then reciprocates the effect of their ownership (and vice versa if they do not) on them

"If you live in the correct cycle, you will find that a lot of the so-called impossible feats or challenges that previously seemed impossible, suddenly start becoming possible, and even easy if you spend enough time learning and adapting from reality itself," concluded Dr Soh.



NHG Workplace Mental Wellness 101

To aid our frontline colleagues in managing personal mental health wellness due to the ongoing battle with the COVID-19 pandemic, the e-learning module titled: "NHG Workplace Mental Wellness 101" is now complimentary to all NHG Staff!

Log onto NHG eLEARN Marketplace to learn more about the self-care strategies to manage stress and burnout.

<https://elearn.sg/nhg> (Internet connection required)