



IN FOCUS



"Insane!" But Worth It!

FACE TO FACE



**First NHG
Clinician-Scientist
Resident Graduates**

HAPPENINGS



**49 Awards for NHG
at NUSMed Dean's
Appreciation Awards 2018**



**NHG HOMER and PaC Launch Inaugural Qualitative
Research Course**

UPCOMING EVENT

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14 - 17 MAY 2019



NHG Education

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"Insane!" But Worth It!

BY MS ZENNE T'NG



"Zenne, honestly speaking, I was very stressed when I first knew that I was assigned to Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) for clinical placement. All of us heard a lot of horror stories about TTSH Speech Therapy Department from our seniors. If we could survive in TTSH, we could survive anywhere..." said one of my students (with some initial hesitation and relief) on her last day of placement. That was many years ago. I was not offended because like her, I was once a learner who struggled to achieve competency, and earn my educators' recognition.

I knew that the clinical educators in the department work extremely hard to impart knowledge to learners but something was missing. What was that? Clinical educators? Learners? Environment? School? Generation gap? No one had an answer. To be honest, no one was able to take time away from the daily 'fire-fighting' routine to pinpoint what went wrong. And when I found out that 10 scholars were returning to our department in 2017, I anticipated that a 'big storm' would hit the department if we continue to teach the same way.

Therefore, I decided to learn more about Healthcare Professions Education, and applied for a scholarship for the Masters of Health Professions Education programme at the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute, Boston, USA, to help me better prepare myself as a clinical educator.

It was an insane decision to do a part-time Masters degree on top of a full-time job. I still remember the stress of having to submit an average of 3 to 4 research methodology assignments and/or discussion posts weekly for one of my modules. I recalled staring blankly at my manuscript write-up, questioning my decision to do this part-time programme.

I've learnt to better manage my time, consistently planning my week, prioritising and beginning my tasks with the end in mind, and most importantly, not being afraid to seek help when encountered with obstacles.

Despite the challenges, I do not regret pursuing this programme because I've learnt relevant skills that help me at work. It taught me how essential inter-professional education and collaboration are, and it widened my perspective when working with people from diverse professional backgrounds. It also taught me to exercise my leadership skills; managing change when faced with challenges at work.

I believe that I've grown to be a better person over the course of these two years. The skills and knowledge that I have acquired (both academic and soft skills) would help me to continue education research and translate innovation to applicable changes on the ground.

We (healthcare professionals) should aspire to be lifelong learners who do not simply master clinical skills, but always be open to unlearn, relearn and co-learn with others. I would encourage my fellow colleagues to embark on this Masters programme for a life-changing experience. We should all continue to enrich and expand our minds.

Quoting Henry Ford, he said: "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young." So, let's stay forever young!

Ms Zenne T'ng Kuan Chen is a Principal Speech Therapist currently heading the Speech Therapy Department of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Her clinical specialty is in intensive care and management of patients with tracheostomy tube and ventilator. Her interests are in inter-professional education, quality improvement and healthcare innovation.

First NHG Clinician- Scientist Resident Graduates

It was a dream come true, twice for Dr Geoffrey Tan, Associate Consultant (Psychiatry), Institute of Mental Health, who has had the privilege of pursuing not one, but two of his life-long passions: Neuroscience and Psychiatry, as part of his residency training at National Healthcare Group (NHG), and now, as his career.

The A*Star scholar who graduated last November as NHG's first clinician-scientist resident shared that it was his experience volunteering in crisis helplines, and taking a patient for psychodynamic psychotherapy during his medical studies in the UK, that sparked his interest in psychiatry, while his interest in neuroscience developed through an early curiosity and exposure from a project in Junior College on mitochondria and during his intercalated degree in Neuroscience.

"I found these experiences to be very enriching and meaningful," said Dr Tan, adding that embarking on the clinician-scientist path would allow him to continue his study into the brain mechanisms underlying vulnerability to mental health disorders and the effect of psychotherapy."

"More importantly, to find ways to translate the findings to making a difference to patients' lives through psychiatry and psychotherapy".

Hence, it was a no-brainer decision when he was presented with the opportunity to embark on

the clinician-scientist path at NHG six years ago, despite already having a PhD under his belt and having to graduate one year later compared to his cohort.

Dr Tan stressed that the training of a clinician-scientist is not without its struggles. "It is a real challenge to juggle between the multiple demands of clinical work and research, an area that I'm still trying to figure out."

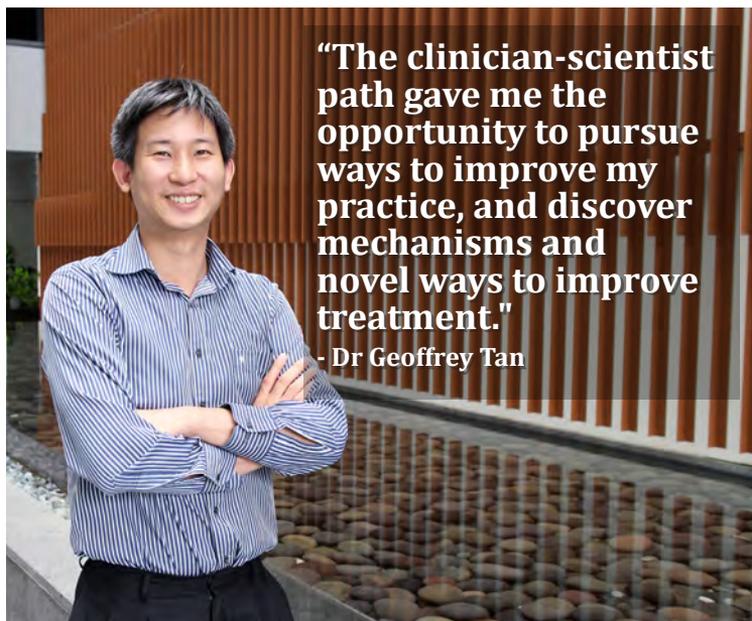
"I find it helpful to think of it as a balancing act that is constantly a work-in-progress."

One of the key learnings that he picked up over the years is the importance of seeking "the support and understanding from respective stakeholders to co-create a culture and community, where research and clinical work can co-exist and complement each other, without being mutually exclusive", Dr Tan said.

He noted that in spite of the challenges, the clinician-scientist path can be "fulfilling".

"The clinician-scientist path gave me the opportunity to pursue ways to improve my practice, and discover mechanisms and novel ways to improve treatment," shared Dr Tan, adding that he now feels more grounded to the needs of his patients, and is more aware of the gaps between research and clinical practice.

"It has (also) helped me open many doors to collaborate with esteemed researchers who have played an invaluable role in my professional development."



"The clinician-scientist path gave me the opportunity to pursue ways to improve my practice, and discover mechanisms and novel ways to improve treatment."

- Dr Geoffrey Tan

Dr Geoffrey Tan Chern-Yee is an A*Star scholar and Associate Consultant (Psychiatry) at the Institute of Mental Health, Department of Mood and Anxiety and Psychotherapy Services.

NHG HOMER and PaIC Launch Inaugural Qualitative Research Course

National Healthcare Group (NHG) Health Outcomes and Medical Education Research (HOMER) and PaIC (The Palliative Care Centre for Excellence in Research and Education) launched their inaugural Basic Qualitative Research in Healthcare Course, on 8 and 9 December 2018, which attracted some 26 palliative care professionals from NHG, SingHealth, and various community hospitals, nursing homes and hospices.

Designed for palliative care professionals, the two-day course conducted by Dr Khoo Hwee Sing (Senior Research Analyst), and Ms Ong Yu Han (Research Analyst) from HOMER, brought the participants through the basic principles and purposes of qualitative research, with the intent of equipping them with the necessary skills, and application of appropriate methods in designing, conducting, and reporting of qualitative research across methodologies.

Adjunct Associate Professor Allyn Hum, Senior Consultant (Geriatric and Palliative Care), and Centre Director of PaIC, who initiated the course, cited the increasing number of palliative care professionals wanting to embark on qualitative research in the field of palliative care, or explore certain topics (e.g. “how do we study empathy in healthcare providers”, “what are the aspects of caring that patients and caregivers appreciate at the end of life”, etc.), but lack the expertise to get started as the main reasons for developing this course.

“That was why we approached HOMER to conduct these workshops, due to their expertise in qualitative research, and our past collaborations,” she said.



^ Dr Khoo (front row, kneeling, second from right), Ms Ong and Dr Hum (standing behind Dr Khoo; left and right respectively) with the participants of the inaugural NHG HOMER and PaIC Qualitative Research Course



“I’ve attended external qualitative workshops before, and they tend to talk about research questions which might not be relevant... and might not resonate with us,” said A/Prof Hum, “whereas this course is purely for the community involved... it was developed with the understanding of the community’s needs.”

“Even some of the examples that Hwee Sing used in the course were the studies that we’ve done before, so that really spoke to the participants.”

“Enjoyable primer for beginners, for people who wish to understand and learn more about QR (qualitative research)... suitable examples relevant to our field,” said one participant.

“This is a very good workshop for people who are interested in doing qualitative research,” said another.

Due to the positive feedback received from the first batch of participants, PaIC intends to continue engaging Dr Khoo and HOMER to conduct yearly courses for healthcare professionals who are keen on embarking on research.

Visit www.nhgeducation.nhg.com.sg/homer for future runs of the Basic Qualitative Research in Healthcare Course.

"Our students are happy and satisfied with the kind of education that they are receiving... and I really want to thank you for your efforts."

- Prof Chong Yap Seng, Dean, NUS Medicine



49 Awards for NHG at NUSMed Dean's Appreciation Awards 2018

A total of 49 awards were presented to medical faculty, junior doctors, and medical departments from the National Healthcare Group (NHG) at the 2018 National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUSMed) Dean's Appreciation Awards held at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), on 20 Nov 2018. The annual awards honour both individuals and departments who have exhibited excellence in training and mentorship to NUSMed undergraduates.

"Today we are celebrating the efforts by our colleagues in teaching the students and preparing the next generation [of healthcare professionals]," said Adjunct Associate Prof Wong Lee Yuen, Senior Consultant, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery (KTPH), and Associate Dean of NUSMed, in her opening speech.



She noted that even though "change is constant", what is also "constant is our (NHG) commitment to our students, to each other, and to collaborate to teach our students so that they are better prepared for the real world."



A/Prof Wong addressing the awardees and guests



NUSMed Vice-Dean Education, Associate Professor Lau Tang Ching (in Maroon) posing for a group photo with the recipients from the Department of General Surgery (TTSH).

Professor Chong Yap Seng, Senior Consultant, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (National University Hospital), who addressed the crowd for the first time in his capacity as Dean of NUSMed, shared that NHG achieved an overall student satisfaction score of 94 per cent in 2018, and has maintained its student satisfaction scores above 90 per cent for the past three years.

"Our students are happy and satisfied with the kind of education that they are receiving... and I really want to thank you for your efforts," he said.

Prof Chong added that the compliments he received from foreign medical faculty about NUSMed students after their overseas elective stints, served as a testament to the quality of medical training at NHG.

"They (overseas faculty) always say that our students are amazing... that they have a fantastic foundational knowledge and a great attitude, and I think that they are welcomed all around the world... so great work," he said.

Prof Chong also lauded the collective efforts of medical departments in NHG that consistently demonstrate excellence in posting and teaching effectiveness. He presented the Clinical Training Excellence Awards to the departments of Anaesthesiology (KTPH); Anaesthesiology, Intensive Care and Pain Medicine (TTSH); Psychological Medicine (TTSH); and Emergency Medicine (TTSH), for achieving posting scores of at least 3.8 (out of 4), and teaching scores of at least 4.5 (out of 5) for two consecutive academic years. And he presented the Clinical Training Merit Award to the Department of General Medicine (TTSH) for achieving similar posting and teaching scores, in the last academic year.

"Thank you once more for all you've done, you are providing a great career for many young people, I think you all should be proud of that," concluded Prof Chong.