



# The EDITORS' MUSINGS



## Dr Tina Tan

### Deputy Editor

Dr Tan is a consultant at the Institute of Mental Health and has a special interest in geriatric psychiatry. She is also an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. Between work and family life, she squeezes time out for her favourite pastimes – reading a good (fiction) book and writing.

Amid the ongoing battle with COVID-19, let's not forget a more insidious enemy – climate change. It is easy to consider climate change as “not my problem” or “not during my lifetime”. These are flawed arguments.

Climate change brings to mind things like hotter weather, haze and rising sea levels. Climate change is also related to an increase in existing, and emerging, infectious diseases. All of these spell immediate problems for us, not just for our future generations.

I hope this issue inspires us to take the steps necessary to slow down climate change. One person or one clinic may not accomplish much in the grand scheme of things. But what if everyone made a concerted, united and consistent effort?

At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the elephant in the room – COVID-19 – which is wreaking havoc across the globe. Many of our colleagues have been affected in various ways and we have featured their views in this issue. SMA has been supporting our Members since the outbreak began and will continue to do so.

Please take care, everyone.

Doctors and climate change seem like two entirely different concepts that share no relationship with one another. However, as our cover tagline shows, both concepts have a role in healing. Doctors are facilitators in the healing process and coaches in the marathon of life; we engage our partners, the patients and the population, to embark on a journey for good health together. Climate change is about how our planet needs healing. For too long, we have used the resources on earth to improve our lives without heeding the needs of sustaining this fragile ecosystem.

Can medicine play a part in climate change? We know that climate change affects health and we are seeing many of these effects in changing exposure to temperatures, air pollution, food safety risks, as well as our current issues with emerging and novel infections.

It is always best to consider the issues from a heuristic perspective. I see a doctor's ultimate purpose as saving lives. Borrowing from Bishop Desmond Tutu, we can do this by pulling people out of the river as they are drowning or, more importantly, find out why they are falling in. The first is an example of critical care and acute medicine, which doctors do very well. The second – that of health promotion and illness prevention – is much harder.

## A/Prof Daniel Fung

### Guest Editor

A/Prof Fung is the father of five grown up children and hopes to be a grandfather to children who have a better world to live in. He drives an electric car and has solar panels in his home. In his spare time, he is a senior consultant at the Child Guidance Clinic and the Chairman Medical Board of the Institute of Mental Health.

Tackling climate change exercises both principles, making sure that we advocate for upstream efforts at sustainable practices (read our Feature article from the Institute of Mental Health Planeteeers) and taking immediate steps to reduce waste, recycle as much as we can and reuse rather than discard.

In this issue, we focus on what doctors can do. Some of this we can do immediately, but some require a mindset shift. Let's remember our primary purpose – “First, Do No Harm” – not just immediate harm, but long-term harm to our world and the next generation. ♦