

# Continued Support for our Fighters

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inexplicable people... I've had it enough  
unclean... WHY ME? I miss my family...  
COVID Spreader  
GO  
Why risk my life?  
How do we all

Throughout the months of May and June, like me, many of you must have followed the reports of local COVID-19 outbreaks very closely. The tracking of the progression of cases depends on where you get your facts from, as the style of reporting may bias one to certain conclusions.

After 16 months of battling COVID-19 in Singapore, some consistent social elements that impede our fight include:

1. Lack of timely and accurate information (eg, the limitations of testing).
2. Inability to disseminate factual news fast and securely.
3. Proliferation of speculations.

### Varied comprehension

It seems that everyone interprets the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic based on what they know, and in truth – no one has a complete picture. Some have gotten very relaxed, because they have not known of anyone getting COVID-19 within their social circles and news of faraway places do not affect them. Yet there are others who have lost loved ones to this virus and might be living in fear that they might lose more family members to this pandemic. The majority of the people would perhaps have a situational reaction, depending on context.

Even within healthcare, I realised that doctors practising in different areas and/or subspecialties can have very different perceptions as well.

Those with family members working in Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) who had to endure “self-isolation” or even move out into temporary accommodations to abide by the “Segregation Order” would have felt the pain of having to be a broken family, even if temporarily. Yet there are doctors who mock this, calling it a “Government-paid staycation”.

I have family and close friends working in TTSH, and I can see that the relentless stress, continuous work and mounting fear is taking its toll. The fatigue and burnout experienced by these doctors are real. But I am also relieved that there is some awareness of discrimination against healthcare workers (HCWs), and that many are speaking up on this. These HCWs are on the front line and they make the most personal sacrifices. I have heard some opine that, “This is what they signed up for, they should know.” The narrative of “healthcare hero” might need to be changed somewhat.<sup>1,2</sup> While it is a calling to be in healthcare, there should also be an understanding and appreciation that we too are humans and this is a job, just like any other.

Social media is always a double-edged sword – on the one hand providing fast information and updates, and comic relief in the form of memes, but also capable of spreading falsehoods fast and inviting much casual and callous comments, maybe even deliberate cruelty. I hope that my friends here will exercise your professionalism, empathy and basic decency to be thoughtful and kind. The whole world is suffering together.

### Means to recharge

I dare say everyone is battling some form of COVID-19 fatigue. People have lost lives and jobs to this. Everyone has lost their freedom to some extent.

I urge all our Members to exercise self-care. Take a break from work and from worrying about COVID-19.<sup>3,4</sup>

This June issue carries some light-hearted articles on the arts. The arts soothe the soul, whichever medium you may prefer – be it theatre, music, visual arts and/or other genres. I personally choose music to match my mood.

If you are feeling very stressed, consider taking a half-hour or short break to get something to drink and put on your favourite music. Let your mind wander and not think of anything in particular. Live in the moment. ♦

### References

1. Barron D. Health Care Workers Don't Want to Be Heroes. *Scientific American*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/33WS3ml>.
2. Bobak A. Medical Ethicist on the Problems with Calling Healthcare Workers 'Heroes'. *Mad in America*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/33YLL5U>.
3. Gov.sg. Tips for Battling Stress and Anxiety during COVID-19. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3fp04WO>.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coping with Stress. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3frSseq>.

Dr Tan is a mother to three kids, wife to a surgeon; a daughter and a daughter-in-law. She trained as a general surgeon, and entered private practice in mid-2019, focusing on breast surgery. She treasures her friends and wishes to have more time for her diverse interests: cooking, eating, music, drawing, writing, photography and comedy.

