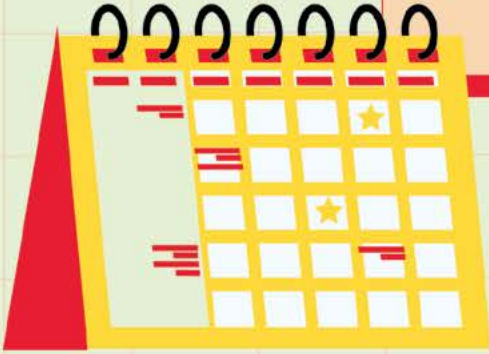


It's been Two Years...



As Singapore slowly resumes some form of normality with the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, we take this chance to invite our Editorial Board members to reminisce about what they have missed in the last two years. Whether they are things one could not do or had to do, regular activities that now seem foreign, or lessons gleaned from the pandemic, here are what they have to share.

Text by Dr Tina Tan, Editor

It's been two years since I've celebrated the Lunar New Year (LNY) with my relatives the way my family usually does. It's been two years since I've seen some of them. Some of my cousins have had children whom I've not met yet, while the seniors have aged and some have even passed on. Then there are those who don't seem to have changed at all. At least, on the outside.

None of us have truly remained unchanged or unscathed since the COVID-19 pandemic first struck Singapore on the eve of LNY in 2020. For us doctors and healthcare workers, the initial fear and unease grew into grim determination. Like soldiers, we kissed our families goodbye at our doorsteps, donned our personal protective equipment and braved the medical front lines. I haven't touched my passport or worn jewellery in two years. Our juniors were seconded and we seniors stepped down. We said farewell to our colleagues as workplace separation kicked in and Zoom meetings became the norm. At one

point, we even endured two months of circuit breaker (CB) which, oddly enough, now seems like a distant memory.

With time, and as the battle stretched on with no end in sight, we grew weary and tired. There was fatigue in the trenches and in the back rooms, where decisions were constantly being made with ever-changing information. I've never felt more drained than when I received circular after circular from our benevolent authorities during one particularly unrelenting period of Phase whatever-it-was post-CB. I'm fairly certain there are others who have had it worse, and I do not mean to downplay all they've endured. It's been rough for all of us.

It's been two years since I've seen the lower half of my patients' faces. Some of them have never seen the lower half of mine. I know my patients and my colleagues by their eyes, never before realising how expressive those windows to our souls can be. Catching glimpses of their noses, lips and cheeks feels strange,

though liberating. I've learnt to ignore the very subtle muffling of voices that comes with wearing masks. There are children who have been born into a world where face masks, hand sanitisers, Zoom and ART testing are a routine part of life.

It's been two years. And I am cautiously optimistic for Singapore. As we climb back to our feet and clear the battlefield for life to resume, I know it won't be the same for many of us. The past two years will have left its mark on us all, in good and bad ways. I, for one, confess that I'm a little anxious for the day when we all get to lower our masks, and discard the anonymity and physical protection against viruses that came with them. What will I see on the other side of the person who now faces me, maskless?

I invite all of us to allow the catharsis of our inner beings, for that internal battlefield to be cleansed. Write about the past two years; it's okay to talk. We all need to heal. Write about your fears. We're here to listen.

*Text by
A/Prof Daniel Fung,
Editorial Advisor*

It's been two years, and I have since lost a parent, given away a daughter and gained two grandsons. The pandemic may have turned our lives around and changed the way we interact as humans, but it has not stopped life from going on. In fact, it allowed us to experience life in different ways.

Before the pandemic, healthcare was digitalising but at a snail's pace. It took us ten years to get an established telepsychiatry programme up when the technology to do this well was available in the early years of the new millennium. Singapore's telemedicine guidelines were developed in 2015 and yet it was only in 2020 that full-scale implementation was kick-started by the COVID-19 pandemic. The arguments of poor rapport and lack of therapeutic alliance were perhaps, in retrospect, just excuses for not taking an innovative leap. Studies published widely during the pandemic suggested that telehealth was just as effective, if not more so, as face-to-face consults in some situations. We have also been able to move to a paperless mode much quicker than we had planned.

To me, the pandemic demonstrated two key aspects of life. The first is that life must go on, and even as some industries have suffered, others have grown tremendously. A small company called Zoom became so ubiquitous, it's hard to imagine work without it. The second is that when push comes to shove, innovations can be readily taken up. Timing and opportunity are in fact the hidden possibilities of dangers and risks. Finally, I would like to see how this digitalising of healthcare translates into smart healthcare, something we have envisioned but not fully experienced. Smart means that the data is organised in such a way that it can be used to inform and predict health outcomes. The ability to now use the digitalised systems to provide smart solutions will determine how healthcare can truly be democratised for the population.

Text by Dr Chie Zhi Ying, Deputy Editor

It's been two years since COVID emerged
Lives shaken, lost and transformed
How time flies and how all became a blur
What transpired in between these years I wasn't sure

As I trudged along to the consult room
There was a lingering sense of dread and gloom
The never-ending queue of patients looms
At the peak of the pandemic we fervently hope it will all end soon

Gowned up in thick PPE – gloves, visors, caps and N95 masks
There lie ahead the many daunting tasks
To see our patients efficiently is a real must
The numbers we see will make you aghast

The air was swelteringly hot and still
Sticky and sweaty are all I feel
Seeing stars and dots in my vision field
Turning thirsty and hungry before I knew

Gone were the days of fun and parties
The streets laid quiet, deserted and empty
The many circulars became tedious and lengthy
Eating alone and working from home became trendy

Crowds rushed to stock up the everyday commodities
Virtual lessons and meetings became a reality
We bade goodbye to all social activities
And travelling overseas simply became a luxury

After countless swabs and vaccinations
And braving waves of viral mutations
Infections and recovery prevailed across the nation
Transiting to endemic state came to fruition

With measures relaxed and life returning to norm
Be proud we have weathered this dragged-out storm
Eagerly marching to work with uniforms neatly donned
Let us now look forward to a new life of joy and pomp ♦