

The Editors' Musings

DR TINA TAN

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist in private practice and an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. She treats mental health conditions in all age groups but has a special interest in caring for the elderly. With a love for the written word, she makes time for reading, writing and self-publishing on top of caring for her patients and loved ones.



As I pen this piece, 2025 has just arrived, which means we are in that in-between zone where Christmas decorations are still up (though slowly being torn down) and the shops are replacing green trees, silver tinsel and shiny ornaments with bright red lanterns, *ang baos* and tins of traditional snacks, heralding the arrival of Chinese New Year (CNY).

To commemorate the festive season, we have invited several doctors and a medical student to submit their thoughts on home, family, and of course, food, while living overseas during culturally significant periods.

It is heartwarming to read that despite being so far from home (for some, not so far), Singaporeans do make it a point to celebrate meaningful events like CNY and Hari Raya.

This issue also features Adj Prof Poh Kian Keong, the immediate past editor-in-chief for the *Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ)*. As Prof Poh steps down from his role, he shares his journey on working with *SMJ* for the past 11 years and the challenges ahead.

On that note, here's to a prosperous Year of the Snake to all our readers!

DR TOH HAN CHONG

Guest Editor

Dr Toh is a senior consultant medical oncologist and Deputy CEO (Strategic Partnerships) at the National Cancer Centre Singapore. He was a former Editor of *SMA News*. In his free time, Dr Toh enjoys eating durians and ice cream, reading, writing, rowing and watching films. Thankfully, the latter four are not fattening.



Singaporeans are a local and global tribe bound by our kampong spirit love of *sedap* (Malay for "delicious") local food, our unique lingo and warmly shared local stories at Christmas, CNY, Hari Raya, and Deepavali festivities. Reading these stories of our overseas ambassadors of medicine brings back my own UK medical school memories. In the 1980's, charity supergroup Band Aid, led by Bob Geldof with "Do They Know It's Christmas?", opened our eyes and hearts to the famine in Ethiopia, a crisis which claimed up to one million lives. I recently met up with my old friend Dr Philip Karuman when he returned to Singapore. Philip was a Singapore Armed Forces commando and an alumnus of the National University of Singapore Faculty of Medicine, with a PhD in cancer biology from Harvard. He has since retired from clinical practice to become a full-time war surgeon with *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, and has just completed a tour of duty in civil-war-torn Sudan and is now out in Afghanistan. There are other Singapore doctors and healthcare workers working in very difficult conditions day and night in such danger zones, called to serve those in greatest need.

"Last Christmas" by Wham! came out in the 1980's also. The timeless Christmas ballad

"Fairytale of New York" by The Pogues then reminded us of the hungry and homeless amid our feasting and plenty. As clinical students, we saw the homeless sick, including the winter "dumping syndrome" of leaving the elderly in hospital A&Es. Then in 1988, *Die Hard* – arguably one of the best Christmas movies ever – came out. We were pumped that if Bruce Willis could overcome evil in Nakatomi Plaza, surely we could pass our final examinations and become good doctors.

In 2023, British think tank Legatum Institute ranked Singapore as having the best healthcare in the world. This accolade is surely contributed to by our unique long-range policy planning, education and training, systems building, "heartware" and deep human capital. So, whether cycling in freezing winter to go on call as a surgical student at Addenbrooke's Hospital, journeying as a Health Manpower Development Plan cardiology fellow at Mayo Clinic, pulling all-nighters removing bomb shrapnel in Sudan, or celebrating Eid with *rendang* by the water in windy Wellington, New Zealand, the global Singapore medical tribe is our priceless resource who make Singapore's strong healthcare even stronger and ensures future-proofing continuity for an even better tomorrow. ♦