

Guiding the Conversation:

How GPs can Champion Advance Care Planning

by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC)



When Dr James Cheong sits with his patients, the conversations may go beyond blood pressure readings or medication refills. Sometimes, they drift into reflections about a loved one's illness, a neighbour's sudden hospitalisation or the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

For Dr Cheong, these are not just passing remarks. They are opportunities to open the door to important conversations about Advance Care Planning (ACP).

"Just as we plan for many other aspects of life, it is equally important to plan ahead for our health," he says.

The GP's Unique Role

As a patient's trusted health advisor, GPs often know their patients best – their worries, family circumstances and what truly matters to them. This puts GPs in a unique position to advocate ACP. Yet, as Dr Cheong acknowledges, busy clinics and short consults can make the topic feel daunting.

ACP captures the patient's voice and guides us, as healthcare professionals, and their loved ones in understanding their wishes and preferences should they lose mental capacity.



Dr James Cheong

Clinical Sub-Lead of
Central-North Primary Care
Network (PCN)

"With the growing complexities of healthcare and an ageing population, primary care consultations are often filled with numerous tasks within limited time. However, talking about ACP does not require dedicating an entire consultation," he explains.

"By breaking ACP conversations into bite-sized discussions and pacing them over time, we can make the process more manageable for both patients and clinicians."

Overcoming Misconceptions

Despite growing awareness, misconceptions remain. Dr Cheong frequently encounters patients who perceive ACP as irrelevant as they do not anticipate future health risks.

"Patients often assume that their loved ones and healthcare team will know what to do when the time comes," he shares.

While Dr Cheong is heartened by the patient's confidence in their loved ones knowing absolutely what needs to be done in times of crisis, he feels that gentle exploration can uncover gaps and uncertainties.

He draws on a familiar analogy: "ACP is a proactive step in future planning, much like purchasing insurance or making financial investments. Both are undertaken not because a crisis is imminent, but to prepare for the unexpected."

"In the same way, ACP protects patients from undesired treatments and outcomes, while ensuring that their care remains aligned with their goals, values and preferences," Dr Cheong emphasises.

Recognising the Right Moments

One may not need a dramatic event or illness to trigger an ACP conversation. In fact, it can begin in everyday encounters.

Dr Cheong shares that patients often reveal their readiness when they start thinking about other forms of planning such as making a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). Others may recall personal experiences like a family member's medical episode and express what they would want, or hope to avoid, if they find themselves in the same situation.

"Times of uncertainty, such as when patients are seeking clarity about healthcare choices and how these fit with their values, are also meaningful opportunities to begin these conversations," he added.

Building Confidence in Advocacy

To support GPs in advocating ACP, AIC and the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) launched a new ACP advocacy training programme in October 2025. The inaugural session, led by Dr Cheong, introduced a video resource that is now available on the CFPS website, with additional information on AIC's Primary Care Pages.

These resources aim to help GPs to:

- identify opportunities and access readiness for ACP conversation
- guide patient by explaining ACP benefits and encouraging periodic plan reviews.

ACP Care Protocol Launching in January 2026



ACP will be rolled out as one of the clinical Care Protocols under Healthier SG from January 2026.

The new protocol provides GPs with structured workflows, referral pathways and standardised materials to guide ACP discussions and connect residents to the right touchpoints either through self-initiated ACP on myACP or facilitated ACP at Public Healthcare Institutions and Community Nodes.

The Gift of Clarity

Dr Cheong frames ACP documentation as serving dual purposes.

"I emphasise to my patients that documenting an ACP is not only a gift to themselves, but also a meaningful way to ease the burden on their loved ones when difficult decisions need to be made," he shares. "It helps them gain clarity and ease moral distress along the way."

For his patients and their families, the benefits of ACP are tangible. Dr Cheong recalls many who describe "a sense of relief and fulfilment" after completing their ACP.

"At its core, ACP is about understanding what matters most to our patients, and as family doctors, we are uniquely positioned to guide them through these conversations."

Guiding your Patients in 4 Steps

When your patients signal their readiness to start on their ACP, you can help them through the process in four steps:

1. Reflect

Consider values, quality-of-life goals and treatment preferences.

2. Select Nominated Healthcare Spokesperson (NHS)

Appoint up to two trusted individuals aged 21 or older who will respect wishes and communicate effectively.

3. Document ACP

Log in to myLegacy@LifeSG to record preferences and appoint NHS. Nominees confirm roles online. ACPs are registered in the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR).

4. Review Regularly

Revisit at key milestones: new decade, diagnosis or major health changes. Can revise anytime while retaining mental capacity.

For patients with serious illnesses or those who prefer guided support, facilitated ACP sessions remain available through trained healthcare professionals. These sessions help residents explore care preferences in depth, ensure their values and wishes are accurately captured, and provide additional support when discussions are more complex or emotionally challenging.



Access the myACP portal and GP resources at for.sg/myacp-gp or by scanning the QR code.