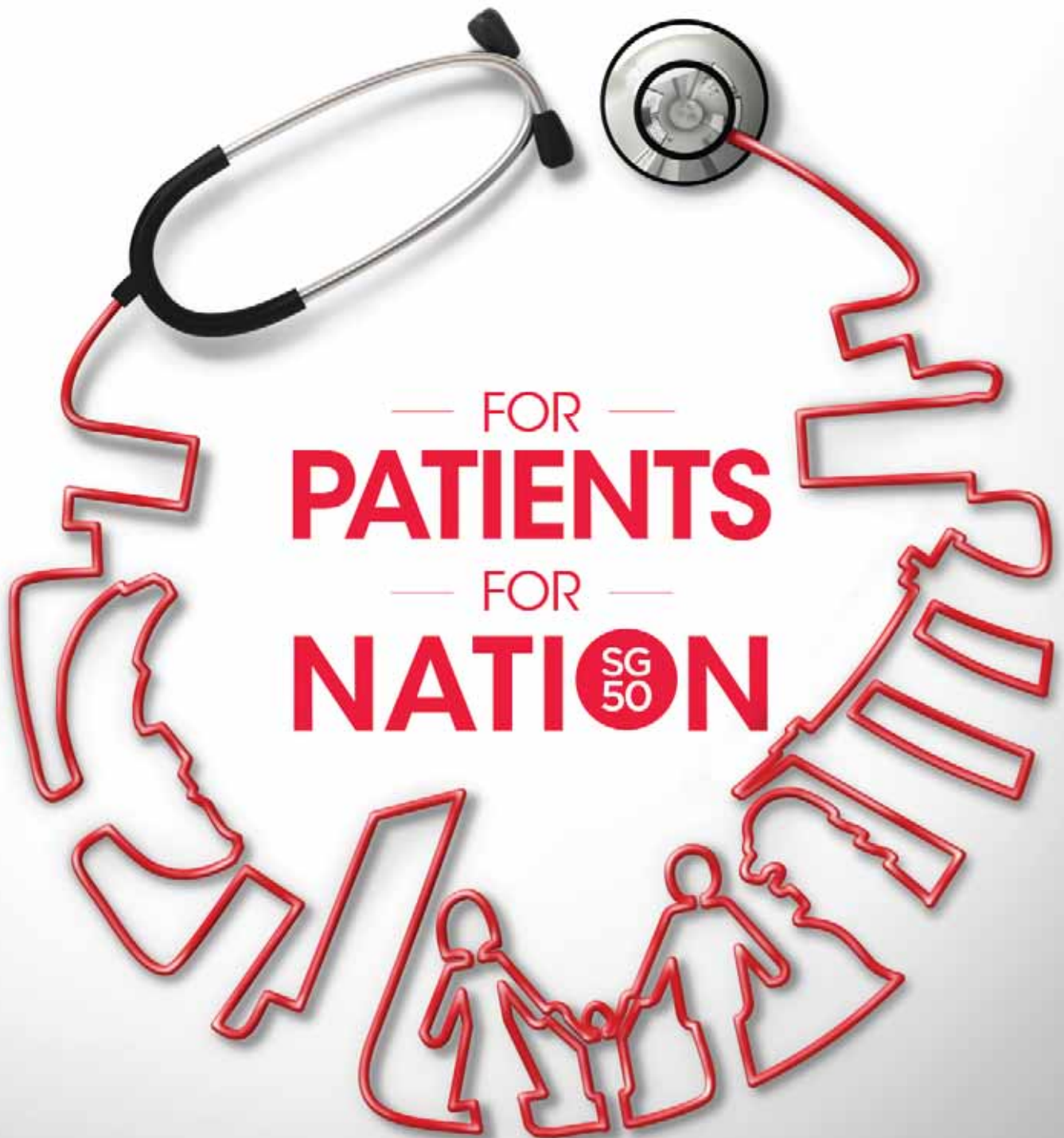


# SMA NEWS



Vol. 47 No. 8 August 2015

MCI (P) 154/01/2015



# BACK TO THE FUTURE

As Guest Editor, I was asked to write the editorial for this SG50 issue of the *SMA News*. Actually I had never, in my entire 25 years as member of the SMA, been asked to write an editorial; what more for the issue that celebrates our fledgling nation's Jubilee. I read through the articles which were a smorgasbord of personal reflections, powerful testimonies and veiled criticisms. There were technical articles on the practice of medicine, travelogues of self-indulgence and doctors displaying swimming and musical excellence. I wondered if I should discuss the importance of universal healthcare coverage, spin another story about the future of ageing or just do what such an issue was all about – acknowledge our past and personalise our future. I had a quick peek at the Merriam Webster dictionary on what an editorial was all about and it states that it is an opinion piece about a topical issue.

I thought long and hard for about 50 seconds and realised that the entire issue was what these 50 years of Singapore was all about. I remembered how we were always reminded that we are a nation of no resources except for our people. That is what we celebrate, the unwavering spirit of medical doctors that brought us from the past into the future. Singapore has nothing but its people: the pioneers led by SMA Honorary Member Mr Lee Kuan Yew and the future, the doctors who are to be. How are we preparing for that future? How do we prepare the next generation of doctors for the next 50 years? We should continue to focus on having role models to look up to, improve our curriculum to meet the needs of our time and also look to innovate. When I say innovate, I don't mean to just find new cures for illnesses. I refer to full-fledged disruptions of what we are doing. For example, change what we do now of taking histories and examining individuals, and embrace technology in developing new predictive models of care, machine learning decision support and personalised educational self-care which is implemented at population level.

Each of these topics could be an article in itself but I am suggesting that we consider moving out of our hospitals and clinics into the community and out of the restrictive confines of our noble tradition to allow for true universal healthcare, where every person is responsible for their own health and taught this from young. As we worry about our ageing population, we also need to think of our young who will have to bear the burden of this generation. How do we prepare the so called "strawberry" generation for resilience? This begins with considering well-being as a different dimension from illness. Poor well-being is not the same as having an illness. In fact, in the World Health Organization preamble to their constitution in 1948, health is defined "as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This means that we should move outside of illness care and into the unfamiliar areas of social service and community integration if we want to take medicine forward. We need to help the younger generation develop beyond technical skills, inculcate abilities to motivate and change behaviours. To provide care from cradle to grave and not the brief episodes of hospital or even outpatient work, including health promotion and well-being as well as prevention care. We will, in the words of one senior colleague, "help the population start well, live well and die well". I suspect that the next 50 years, or maybe just the next 50 issues of *SMA News*, will be very exciting for what this newsletter is all about – you, the learning and innovating medical doctor of our future. ♦



A/Prof Daniel Fung is Chairman, Medical Board, at the Institute of Mental Health. He is reminded of a verse from Isaiah that his wife, Joyce shared with him recently,

*"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a New Thing!"*

*A/Prof Daniel Fung*  
Guest Editor