



# COMBATING NCD

## LEARNING POINTS FROM OUR REGION

Text and photo by Dr Benny Loo

The Vietnam Medical Association (VMA) was established in Hanoi on 3 March 1955. Throughout the years, the VMA has been a robust institution with significant achievements and contributions to the advancing of the general health status of the Vietnamese and in increasing awareness on the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. One of VMA's main functions is to organise conferences to advance their members' specialised knowledge, skills and ethical morale. The President of VMA, Dr Nguyen Thi Xuyen, is also the current chairperson of the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations (MASEAN).

On 25 October 2019, VMA held the 8th Annual Scientific Conference in Hanoi, with the theme "Management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) at commune health stations in MASEAN". The conference was well attended, with invited speakers hailing from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. I was honoured to represent SMA in sharing a case study on Singapore's effort in combating NCDs, specifically on our "War on Diabetes".

Many esteemed Vietnamese doctors and government officials were invited to

share their insights on specific NCDs such as prediabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, and they offered a balanced view of the challenges from medical and administrative perspectives. Combating NCDs requires the close collaboration of medical expertise and resources, and the battle can be long-drawn if the process is not strategically planned. The discussions revealed the importance of teamwork – having many relevant stakeholders work together to solve the various obstacles towards the common goal of better community health.

The Burmese delegate shared success stories of how they improved health outcomes in specific areas by increasing access to regional health centres and empowering these centres to manage NCDs. The difficulties faced were the lack of family medicine physicians to coordinate the care of these patients, and limited government funding to propagate these programmes. The pros and cons of "Westernisation" were highlighted by the Thai and Indonesian delegates. The influence of western diets had increased the percentage of obese citizens and related NCDs in their

countries. On the other hand, the influx of advanced technology granted new opportunities to enhance medical care in terms of coverage and efficiency, such as using telemedicine to review patients with NCDs in remote areas. Through the conference, I learnt that many Southeast Asian nations face similar challenges in managing NCDs, albeit in different socio-environmental settings.

It was my first visit to Vietnam and I was overwhelmed by the colourful culture and chaotic traffic. But my deepest impression was the warmth and friendliness that the friends from VMA showered upon me. They treated me like their younger brother and ensured that I had the best experience of the conference, of VMA and of Vietnam. I was humbled by their spirit and graciousness, and had learnt so much from their medical discussions, culture and history. I take this opportunity to thank all my VMA friends and hope that we will meet again in the near future. *cảm ơn!*\*. ♦

\*Thank you in Vietnamese

### Legend

1. Dr Loo (first from left) with delegates from Thailand, Vietnam (vice-president), Myanmar and Indonesia



Dr Loo is a consultant in paediatric medicine at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. He looks forward to a morning dose of caffeine and plenty of patients' smiles every day. He is also the chairperson of the SMA Doctors in Training Committee.

