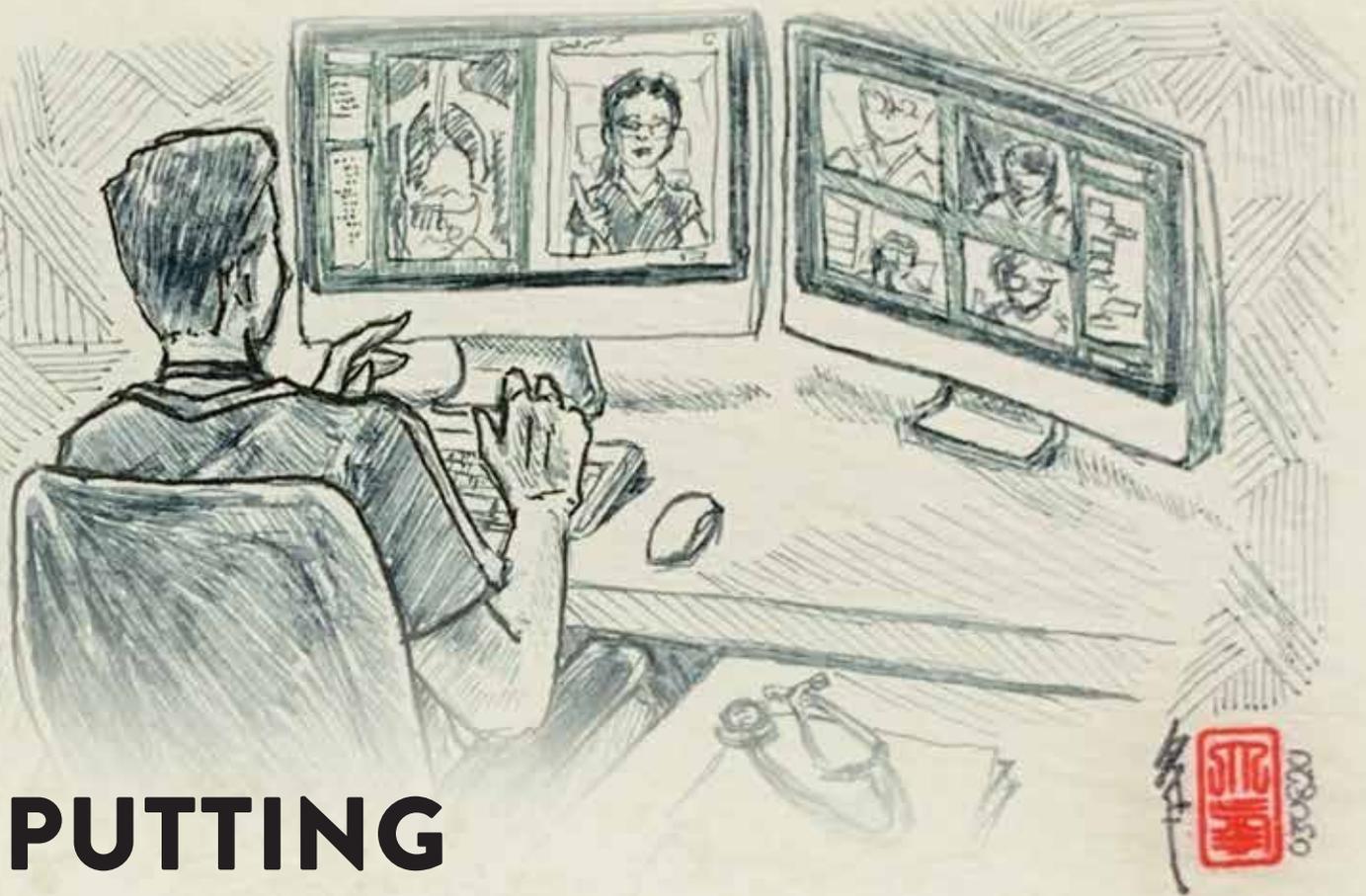


Illustration: Dr Justinian Zai



PUTTING TECHNOLOGY TO GOOD USE

Text and photos by Dr Tan Yia Swam

As the COVID-19 situation in Singapore stabilises and we adopt a new kind of normal in Phase 2, most daily activities have resumed. Precautions are still in place, the efficacy of which only time will tell. Anecdotal reports of people flouting rules and personal observations have made me realise that despite all the education and regulations, people will still make their own risk assessments and decide what they feel is best. The law and punishments have been in effect, but there can only be so many enforcers at any one time. When the average citizen takes matters into his/her own hands, unpleasant scenes happen. Thankfully, there are also occasional heart-warming stories of understanding and supportive corrective advice by strangers or neighbours.

I wonder – how are all of you holding up? My friends know about the stressors I have had in the past months. Without going into detail, there has been a series of non-stop, minor crises in my family – health issues, physical problems in the house and monetary concerns. What has been supporting me, hopefully for my readers here as well, is my network of true friends who have been reaching out; even if not physically, through the various social media platforms. The care packages of food, snacks and drinks have been little spots of delight. I am very glad that there is more awareness of the mental and emotional burden on individuals during COVID-19, with more support available. Do check out <https://bit.ly/2RVdPSI> for a list of counselling services for doctors.

The convenience of technology

Social networking is so easy. At the touch of a button, you can connect with friends. WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom platforms allow for easy communication, be it a text, a GIF, or a video call. For those who prefer photos and images, Instagram is a great outlet. Do check out the hashtag #sgartforhcw for a collection of artworks that will inspire you. So many other options exist: Flickr, DeviantArt, Tumblr, TikTok, WeChat, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter – whichever platform and community best fits your preference. One can also relax with entertainment on Netflix, YouTube, Spotify, OverDrive, Wattpad, Apple Books and Kindle. Even the National Library Board has e-books which are easy and convenient to borrow.

For professional matters, it has been very convenient to attend continuing medical education and peer review learning sessions on Zoom. Travel time is eliminated, so even when clinics run late, I can still log on in time. Meetings on Zoom have been a lot more focused and directed; there may even be more involvement from all participants if the chairperson is attentive and directs the meeting well.

Webinars for colleagues or the public are a lot easier to run and generally more cost effective, without the need for venue rental or budget for refreshments. What the majority of us may not appreciate is that such electronic services are not actually free. There is a monetary and manpower cost to having a web server and hosting the event, staff cost for creating publicity materials, and cost for actual support during the event. For example, the free version of Zoom allows up to 100 participants but is capped at 40 minutes; to host a massive event like the SMA telemedicine webinar with almost 1,800 participants, a paid account with add-ons is needed to support. The various organisers of webinars have done a lot of work behind the scenes to make these happen, while the speakers and participants may just need to turn up. Let's be appreciative of them for getting all these organised for us.

Adapting to changing times

The printed word used to be very respected and held in high regard.

Learned people and experts would have to put in years to write and edit, before publishers accepted and sent the work to print. Even then, there were several major publication scandals – hoaxes, plagiarism or harassment. With the Internet, anyone can be a writer on social media. In fact, anyone can take on any identity to write anything they wish.

Personal attacks, divisive comments, negativity and cowardice can hide behind anonymity. Readers are generally more prone to reaction (it's so easy to "Like" or "Unlike"!), rather than thinking about what was written and discerning truth from fiction. I harp on this, time and time again, because I am very disheartened to glance at various chats and forums, and read unfair, illogical and vile comments. Surely we are better than a mob mentality?

As President of the SMA, I have this monthly column to pen my thoughts, with time to think, edit and even re-write. I stand by my words. Sometimes I wonder, who still reads print? Am I "shouting" out into the void, with only myself and the editorial team knowing what I have written? I'm sometimes tempted to write some nonsense (or something absurd?) here, just to trigger some response.

I have had the occasional personal message from colleagues, so, thank you very much. I believe the SMA is a great platform to share views, and *SMA News* is the most appropriate way – write an article, share your insight. As I consolidate my team and update the

way SMA operates, I aim to modernise and use other platforms to interact with members and other doctors.

Let's use technology wisely, to always enrich and encourage each other. ♦



Legend

1. Supporting a friend's business! Enjoying delicious food and drinks delivered to my home
2. Surprise gift: a handmade mask mailed to me from an old patient
3. Unexpected perk-me-up from an old friend



Dr Tan is a mother to three kids, wife to a surgeon; a daughter and a daughter-in-law. She trained as a general surgeon, and entered private practice just over a year ago, focusing on breast surgery. She treasures her friends and wishes to have more time for her diverse interests: cooking, eating, music, drawing, writing, photography and comedy.

