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HLC LEADERSHIP TIMES

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LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS FROM SARS

BY PROF PHILIP CHOO

In this issue of Leadership Times, we share Prof Philip Choo's leadership lessons from SARS, which we hope will help support you in the current COVID-19 crisis.

PROVIDE CLARITY AND SET GOALS

Time is of essence in a crisis. Provide clear directions so that your team knows what to do. During SARS, I gave the team 6 hours to convert normal wards into isolation wards to meet the shortfall of isolation beds. The target was achieved. In a crisis, it is important for leaders to set clear and specific targets to focus the team and to help people be engaged with the work needed to fight the battle.

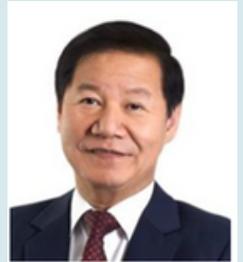
WALK WITH YOUR TEAM

As leaders, you are accountable for the well-being of your staff. Walk with your team and walk the talk – practise the same instructions that you have given and role model leaderful behaviours. Our senior leaders were in the wards every day working alongside the staff during SARS. This signalled trust in the system and gave the staff confidence – the wards were safe, our safety protocols were holding up. As a leader, be transparent and keep communicating with your team. This will allay their anxieties and help people stay calm and focused on the necessary work.

BE PREPARED TO MAKE TOUGH DECISIONS

I made the tough decision of recalling all doctors on leave to manage the SARS outbreak. During a crisis, you will have to make unpopular but right decisions. Be guided by your values. Right decision making is tough. You need to practise good decision making during peace times to build trust and confidence with your team. During a crisis, people will continue to put their trust in you and your decisions.

We have many courageous and dedicated people in our healthcare family. I trust that we will be able to weather the fight against COVID-19, just as we came out stronger after SARS.



Prof Choo is Group CEO of the National Healthcare Group. He was the Acting Chairman, Medical Board, at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) during Singapore's fight with SARS in 2003.

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