

# LEADING HEALTHCARE

The newsletter of the Healthcare Leadership College

## Dean's Message

### Moral Courage

We started off with courage.

Let me quote Field-Marshal Viscount Slim again, whose book "From Defeat Into Victory" is on the US army's leadership reading list.

"Courage is the basis of all leadership, indeed of all virtues in man or beast. Courage is of less importance in the higher than in the lower levels of command, but the greater the responsibility the more the emphasis shifts from physical to moral courage – a much rarer quality. Rare, but essential to higher leadership."

The military model of leadership is very applicable to healthcare because it is also predicated on lives, leadership and economics. And to higher leadership in healthcare, moral courage is as critical if not more, because paradoxically, less is at stake. Bad decisions in healthcare do not usually lead to immediate and final consequences as in war. For a courageous but necessary decision in healthcare, there is, from the leader's personal perspective, less to gain and more to lose in the short term.

The chain of courageous decisions should flow down from the very top to the front, for the system to work optimally. In war, this is expressed by the physical courage of men and officers in battle.

A politically courageous decision has to be backed up by correct execution on the ground. Poor execution in both leads to death. But in war, the death is usually shared by the leaders on the ground. In healthcare, that direct line of accountability by leaders on the ground has become blurred.

In general medicine still in many hospitals, inpatient care teams led by consultants change every week, while the patients remain. Patients with multiple morbidities are discharged to polyclinics or 3 to 6 specialist outpatient visits. They have long lists of drugs that are not rationalised. Once they are discharged, the consultant is no longer accountable for the individual patient. The patient becomes the responsibility of a system.

The hospitals and polyclinics are working very hard to make these changes happen by improving processes, but they must not blur or lose that chain of accountability which must be fundamental to healthcare.

**Associate Professor Aymeric Lim**  
Dean, Healthcare Leadership College  
Vice-Dean, Dean's Office, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine

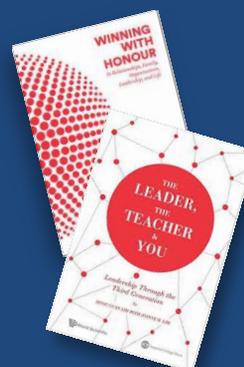
Happy New Year to all our friends! With major changes just announced to the healthcare clusters, this marks the next step in the transformation of our healthcare system to meet Singapore's future needs. As one public healthcare family, let us work together for our fellow Singaporeans, towards better health for all.

## Highlights



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# Insights and Perspectives

## Associate Professor Benjamin Ong – Director of Medical Services



A/Prof Benjamin Ong, Director of Medical Services (Photo: MOH)

Associate Professor Benjamin Ong was appointed as Director of Medical Services (DMS), at the Ministry of Health Singapore on 1 January 2014. Prior to this, he was the Chief Executive of the National University Health Systems (NUHS), a healthcare cluster that oversees the National University Hospital (NUH). During his 27 years with NUH, he has also helmed the hospital's Medical Board as its Chairman and; was Chair of the Department of Medicine at the Yong Loo Lin Medical School.

*The Healthcare Leadership College brings you DMS' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for Singapore's health system and how healthcare leaders may take on these challenges.*



**In your view, what is the top priority for Singapore healthcare today?**

I feel that it is critical to shift the focus from acute care towards preventive and primary care, and intermediate and long-term care. It is a challenging and slow process because many members of the public and doctors still see the acute care model as the best way to do things. But if we do not change, with life expectancies and chronic diseases on the rise, we will face a huge and unsustainable strain on manpower and financial resources – without necessarily seeing better health and treatment outcomes.



**What are some of the implications of the shifts in care approaches?**

Shifting our focus towards upstream and downstream care also means that we need to move more resources there. For example, should we reduce manpower in the acute hospitals and have more doctors and nurses work in community care and nursing homes? Should acute hospitals rethink the way they operate: for example, more day treatments instead of inpatient admissions, working with intermediate and step-down care providers so that patients don't stay longer than necessary? For doctors, are fewer prepared to become specialists and work as family physicians? These are the hard choices and trade-offs that will have to be made.

## Q What are some important trends or developments in healthcare to monitor closely?

**A** One key trend that we need to watch carefully is medical advancement – new medical technologies, new diagnostic tools, new medications. We need to assess the cost-effectiveness of the medical interventions, so that we deliver care that is appropriate to needs. It is simply not sustainable for us to keep on using the most advanced technologies and latest medications. The Agency for Care Effectiveness (ACE) was set up to evaluate the use of health technologies and provide guidance on the use of high cost technologies and treatments. But most importantly, we need a mindset shift throughout the system, to have doctors and members of the healthcare family understand and share this principle of providing care at the right level and not over-treating.

## Q Pokémon Go has taken the world by storm. What are your views on the game?

**A** The Pokémon Go phenomenon has encouraged physical activity. This is a positive thing – it has gotten many more Singaporeans out and about in order to “catch ‘em all”, or to hatch a rare Pokémon to add to their collection. In my case, as I walk for exercise almost every night, I could potentially hatch a lot of eggs. We should similarly think about how we can leverage on different platforms that are fun and exciting, to improve fitness.



## Q What are we doing in the areas of primary and preventive care, which are critical in our care transformation journey?

**A** Most primary care today is provided by the private GPs, so we need to work hand-in-hand with them on our journey in transforming care: supporting them in disease prevention and chronic disease management efforts. The private GPs have very different considerations and challenges in operating a sustainable livelihood. We need to better understand their needs and aspirations, and identify those with positive mindsets who are willing to work together with us.

## Q What are the leadership attributes needed to take the Singapore healthcare system into the future?

**A** I urge our public healthcare leaders to be open-minded to changes, and to bear in mind the larger system considerations. Some of us may feel that what we can do is limited, some don't see the changes as relevant to them, and others say that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. But we can all do more to nudge changes in this direction within our own spheres of influence. For example, where possible, prescribe generic drugs instead of brand-name drugs, do not test excessively, and do not keep patients in the hospitals for longer than necessary. Most importantly, as public healthcare leaders, you must always remember that healthcare is a calling – it is a lifetime of service and duty to the people of Singapore.

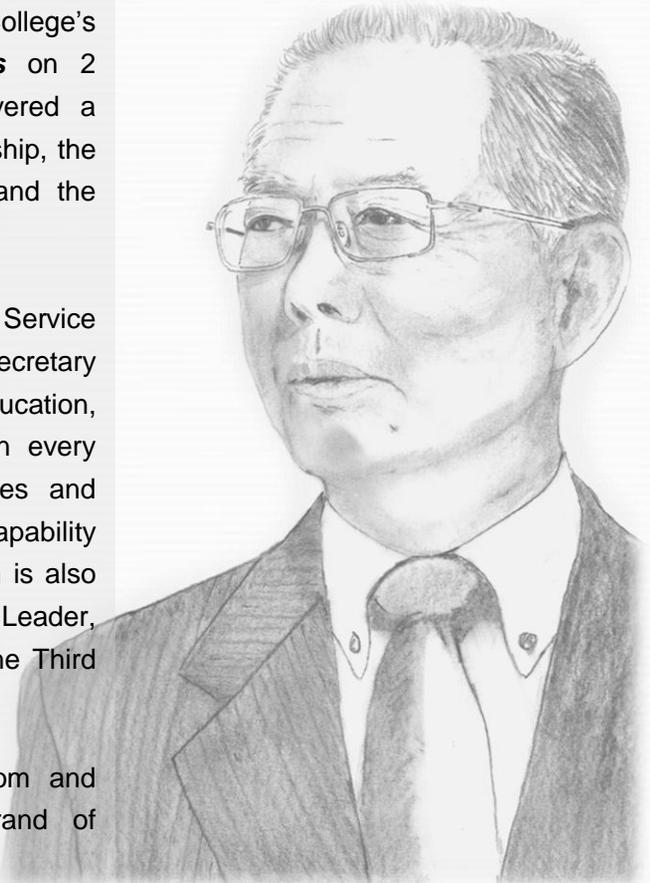
# Distinguished Speaker Series

## Mr Lim Siong Guan: Leading Change in the Public Service

At the second of the Healthcare Leadership College's (HLC) 2016 *Distinguished Speaker Series* on 2 November 2016, Mr Lim Siong Guan delivered a thought-provoking lecture on the role of leadership, the virtue of excellence, the development of talent, and the importance of change.

Mr Lim was the Head of the Singapore Civil Service from 1999 to 2005 and was Permanent Secretary variously in the Ministries of Defence, Education, Finance, and the Prime Minister's Office. In every appointment, he introduced innovative policies and practices which enhanced the drive, capacity, capability and performance of the organisations. Mr Lim is also the co-author of the best-selling books "The Leader, The Teacher & You — Leadership Through the Third Generation" and "Winning with Honour".

HLC has captured some of Mr Lim's wisdom and insights, punctuated with his distinctive brand of humour, for us to reflect on.



(Illustration by Trevor Chua, HLC)

### *On leadership*

**"Leadership is making (good) things happen that on their own would not happen. Leaders should address the moral issues - is this good or bad or is this right or wrong and be convinced that this is the good and right thing to do."**

**"There are three roles of the leader that cannot be subcontracted out – A leader is a guardian of values, a leader is a guardian of talent and a leader is a guardian of the future."**

### *On the leader as a teacher*

**"The teacher rejoices when the student realises his or her full potential; indeed, the more the student exceeds the teacher, the greater we could consider the success of the teacher."**

**"If a leader sees his role as not just to lead well for today but to build well for the future, his best contribution then is as a teacher; identifying potential, recognising effort, encouraging ideas, and pursuing excellence with a continuous drive for the organisation to be the best that it can be and the people to be the best that they can be."**

### *On being Number One or Number Two*

**“It matters a lot whether you are running as Number Two, following the leader’s every move, or as Number One with no leader to follow and having to create your own way. To be unique and different, you have to push to be Number One as there is nobody else in that space.”**

### *On innovating to be in time for the future*

**“A winning organisation thinks ahead and acts in good time, and future-focussed leadership is what sets apart the superior organisation from the mediocre one. Being in time for the future offers strong motivation for continuous improvement and creative innovation.”**



### *On being the best that you can be*

**“Do not compare yourself with others. Simply be the best that you can be. If you are already the best that you can be and you are already doing your best, then no one has the right to ask you for more. But if you are not putting in your best, then you should be angry with yourself.”**

### *On talent development*

**“The key to bringing out the best in people lies in leadership that inspires them to be the best that they can be.**

**Everyone in an organisation has talent, though the nature and extent of the talent would vary from person to person.**

**Do not be selfish about talent, it does not belong to the individual supervisor, it belongs to the organisation.”**

### *On change*

**“The train is about to leave the station. You have a choice whether you want to get on the train or get off the train, but don’t get in front of the train. Change is the very essence of the function of leadership, for which the failure to change may be catastrophic for the organisation.”**

## Upcoming Programmes

Introduction to Systems Thinking  
16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017  
(Participation via nomination)

Dynamic Governance –  
A Healthcare Perspective  
1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017  
(Participation via nomination)

Introduction to Systems Thinking  
23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2017  
(Participation via nomination)

Healthcare Policy & Governance Programme  
19<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017  
(Participation via nomination)

For Enquiries please email us at [hlc@mohh.com.sg](mailto:hlc@mohh.com.sg)

### Leading Healthcare Team

#### Dean's Message

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### About the Healthcare Leadership College

The Healthcare Leadership College, a division of MOH Holdings, supports the building of strong leadership capacity and capabilities for our national public healthcare system, in line with the Ministry of Health's vision and strategic priorities.

We develop and deliver high quality programmes and other learning platforms for public healthcare leaders, covering topics such as leadership and organisational development, public service ethos and values, and key healthcare policies and issues.

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