

# LEADING HEALTHCARE

The newsletter of the Healthcare Leadership College

## TOMORROW'S POSSIBILITIES IN TODAY'S WHY

- *Tomorrow's Possibilities in Today's Why - Dean's Message by Prof Pang Weng Sun*
- *The Weight of the Glass by HLC*
- *Purpose ∞ Care by Minister Masagos Zulkifli*



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# Tomorrow's Possibilities In Today's Why

By Prof Pang Weng Sun,  
Dean, Healthcare Leadership College



In my secondary school days, an English Literature teacher taught the class the 'wh' (he pronounced it 'whuh') question – who, what, when, where, why, how. Applied to a narrative, it helped us understand better the intent of the author as his story unfolds. In science, the same questions drive us to discoveries, inventions and innovations. How is this applicable to leadership?

Questions that help us understand the rationale for doing what we do - the outcomes, the implications of not doing, when and how we do; how we evaluate.

Recently I came across two books – “Asking Why” – a collection of speeches and writings by Ho Kwon Ping, a prominent businessman and Chairman of Banyan Holdings (he was also our distinguished speaker at a recent HLC event) and “What’s your question: inspiring possibilities through the power of questions” by Ng Choon Seng, a Certified Master Learning Coach.

Both challenge us to question what we see, what we know or think we know. Questions that help us understand the rationale for doing what we do - the outcomes, the implications of not doing, when and how we do; how we evaluate. Questions that help us to think out of the box and look at issues from different viewpoints.

Healthcare has embarked on a major shift – the nation-wide public sector Next Generation Electronic Medical Records (NGEMR) system – is not just a means for better medical documentation. It links up the whole healthcare system – an intelligent system that allows collection of data to guide practice; with the potential for evaluation of health outcomes and costs in the background. This will be the engine to help us deliver healthcare nationwide across different sectors even as we evolve our population health care models.

We need to be mindful that no system is perfect and we do need to continually monitor, make changes as necessary and be mindful we are not trapped in a rigid system that limits future change.

What has all this got to do with HLC? Perhaps asking appropriate questions is the foundation of change and quality improvement in healthcare. As leaders, it is easy to accept the status quo and follow the norm. We need to learn to ask the right questions. To begin with, we need an observant eye and an inquisitive mind. This is not something that comes naturally to all of us (certainly not to me, having grown up in an environment of conforming to rules). We need to be unafraid to ask; and we need to give heed to questions posed.

HLC is now on the cusp of her second decade. We will continue to ask questions, continue to learn and grow and nurture the healthcare leadership to meet the nation's healthcare needs. In this vein, it would be most appropriate, in this issue, to begin with a question in the article enclosed, called *The Weight of Glass*.

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# THE WEIGHT OF THE GLASS

Once upon a time a psychology professor was teaching stress management principles to an auditorium filled with students. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they'd be asked the typical "glass half empty or glass half full" question. Instead, with a smile on her face, the professor asked, "How heavy is this glass of water I'm holding?"

Students shouted out answers ranging from eight ounces to a couple of pounds.

She replied, "From my perspective, the absolute weight of this glass doesn't matter. It all depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute or two, it's fairly light. If I hold it for an hour straight, its weight might make my arm ache a little. If I hold it for a day straight, my arm will likely cramp up and feel completely numb and paralyzed, forcing me to drop the glass to the floor. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels to me."

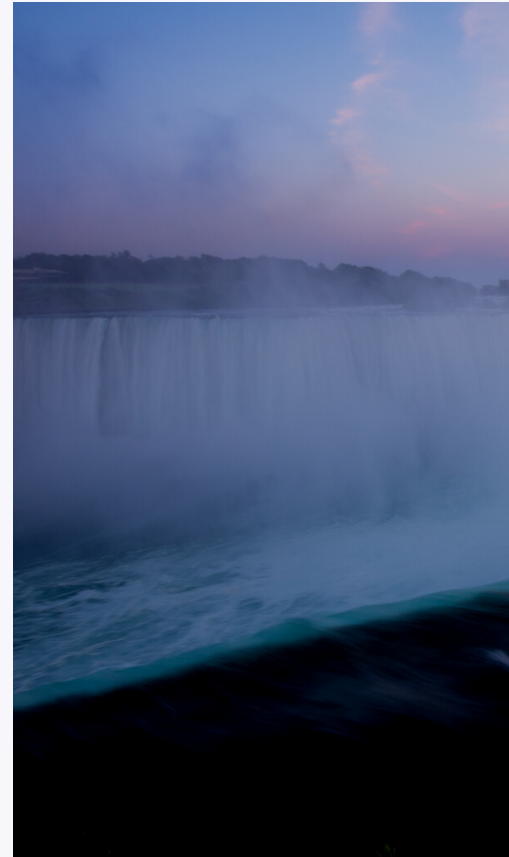
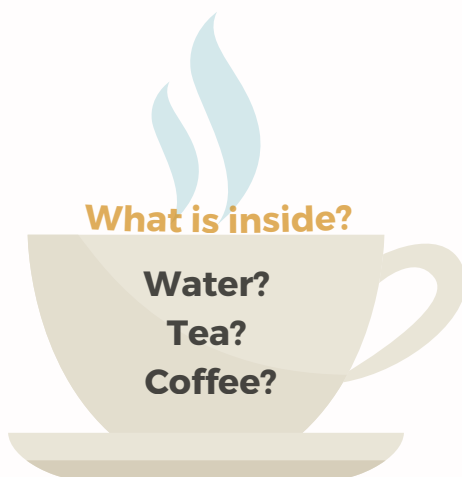
As the class nodded their heads in agreement, she continued, "Your stresses and worries in life are very much like this glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and you begin to ache a little. Think about them all day long, and you will feel completely numb and paralyzed — incapable of doing anything else until you drop them."

This short story surfaces some other reflections that are useful reminders for us in our work and daily lives.

## Articulating our Burdens

Do you know what is in your glass? Water, tea, or coffee? To be aware of our mental load means recognizing what we give weight to and why. Over time, we gradually take on more responsibilities and obligations as we progress in our careers and life journeys. Our glass becomes fuller and we may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of things we are accountable for.

At this point, we may feel heavy laden and weary as it is a strain to keep holding on to the glass. Many times, we get caught up in automatic pursuits and lose sight of what our original motivations were. Do we truly want a glass of tea or do we prefer water? Sometimes, the stressors in our life are due to an ambition or obligation that may not be truly what we want or make sense to chase after. Ask yourself: do you really want what is in the glass or would you be happier with another drink?



## Streamlining our Responsibilities

Is your glass full or is it overflowing and pooling at your feet? Do you know how much water your glass can hold? Often, we expect to be able to perform and produce results. We continue to pour into our glass not realising that we have reached its capacity. When the burden is too great or the results fail to live up to our expectations, we may feel disappointment in ourselves and question our coping ability or competence. Rather than doubt and judge ourselves, this can be a practical reality check to



**Is your glass full or  
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examine our coping mechanisms. The glass may not be able to hold all the water we wish to have. It is unrealistic to expect to perform well every day. We may need to streamline our responsibilities and channel our energy into tasks of greater value to us. This could be delegating work and trusting our teams. It could also mean being honest with others that we are weary and need help.

### **Building the Muscles through Rest & Repeat**

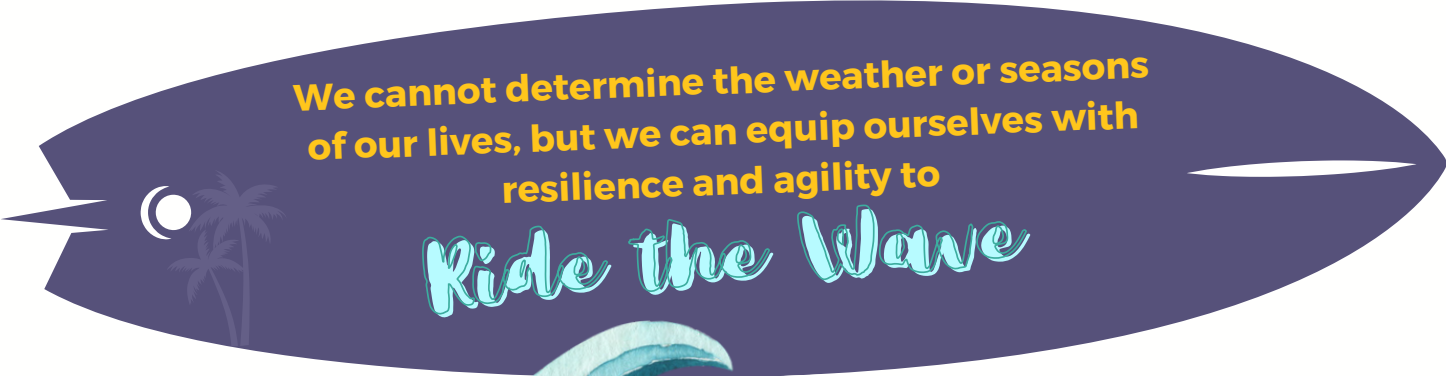
The stability of our lives comes from habits and routines created over time. While many of us prefer predictability, there will always be uncertainties and unexpected occurrences in our lives. How then do we navigate the ebbs and flows of change? If we can only control a finite sphere of events around us, then we should prioritize our sources of strength and motivation. For many of us, they are our relationships,

hobbies, and health which, while vital, are often left with the scraps of our energies. How can we prioritize our energies so that we can lead fulfilling lives?

Resilience, like a muscle, is strengthened through repetitions of exertion and recovery. Learning to place the glass down is crucial to building better stamina in the long term as well as greater strength to carry heavier loads. Over time, we can learn to thrive with greater responsibilities as long as we continue to develop resilience and prioritize rest. We cannot determine the weather or seasons of our lives, but we can equip ourselves with resilience and agility to ride the waves. Being able to rest in the highs and lows will enable us to run long and well in our journey.

#### **Reference:**

Thanh, M (2017, March 9). *The Weight of the Glass*. Medium. <https://medium.com/motivationapp/the-weight-of-the-glass-a0e120ed90b3>



**We cannot determine the weather or seasons  
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**Ride the Wave**



## Minister Masagos Zulkifli

Minister for Social and Family Development  
Second Minister for Health  
Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs  
Republic of Singapore

If asked to describe my leadership journey thus far and what defines me, I would use just two words: *Purpose*; and *Care*.

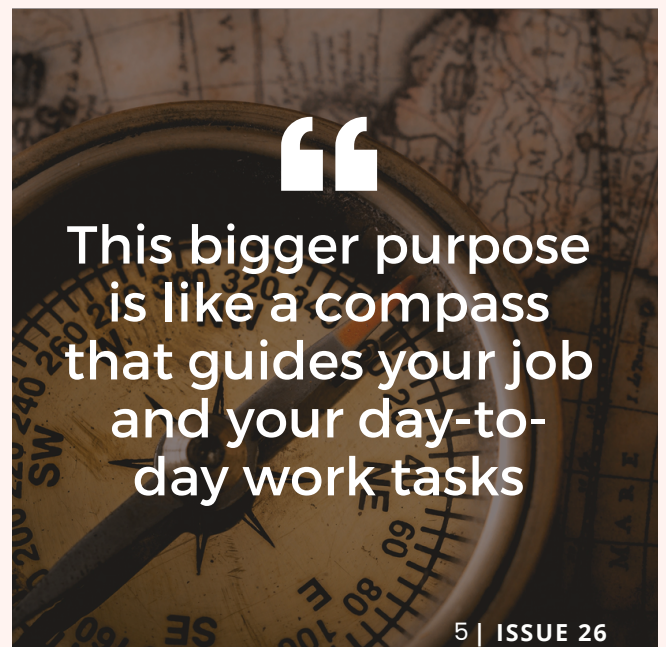
I grew up in very modest circumstances, but throughout my schooling journey and my career, I was given many opportunities and received much help and care from many different people. Because of my experiences, I have always believed in contributing to the larger good and in the importance of caring for others, especially those who are less fortunate.

### Purpose

As a leader, it is very important that you focus on the larger purpose and help your team to see and believe in that larger purpose. This will allow your team to work together and achieve missions greater than what each one of us can do or achieve alone.

What do I mean by purpose? It depends for different individuals in different areas. For me, at this stage of my life, it is about contributing to the best interests of Singapore and Singaporeans. For those of you in healthcare, it might be seeing your patients recover and continue to stay in good health. This bigger purpose is like a compass that guides your job and your day-to-day work tasks.

Mr Masagos entered politics in 2006, after being elected as Member of Parliament for Tampines Group Representation Constituency, and was appointed Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Education. Prior to that, Mr Masagos was working in Singapore Telecommunications Limited and last held the position of CEO, SingTel Global Offices. From 2008 to 2014, Mr Masagos held other positions in the Singapore Government, within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs. He was appointed Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs in May 2018. From October 2015 to July 2020, Mr Masagos was Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. He took on his current appointments on 27 July 2020.



“  
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Crisis is when the foundation of leadership that you've built up over the years is tested. If your people can hold on to this bigger purpose in times of crisis, they will be able to go beyond their peacetime job definitions and have the resolve to do what is right under unusual and unexpected circumstances. They will understand that it is not for any one individual, but for everybody.

A strong sense of purpose is also what guides good leaders in making difficult or unpopular decisions. We must be able to make principled decisions for the long term good, even if they may cause short term difficulties or unhappiness. I have had to decide on some sensitive issues in my previous portfolios in other Ministries. And it is not easy because every decision comes with its own set of trade-offs and there is often no perfect solution. You cannot please everyone. So, if you are not steadfast and clear on your core purpose, it will be tempting and easy to avoid confronting the real problems and postpone the issues to a later time.



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## Care

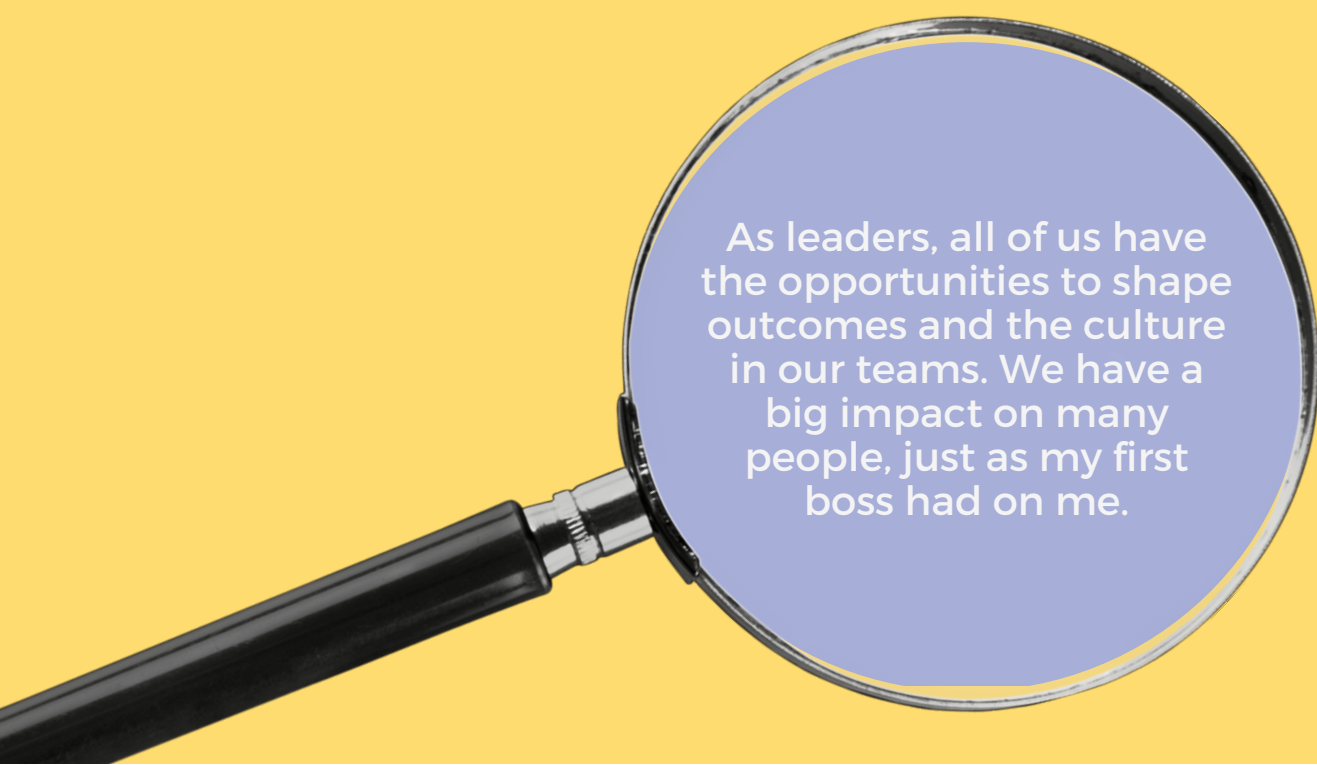
As much as we are leaders, we are also fellow human beings. Although we may have to do the difficult thing for the greater good, we must also not lose the human touch. Remember that we can never achieve the mission alone, we must do it as a team. To run fast, you can run alone, but to run far, you need to run together.

When you set your sights on the long goal and run far, it takes a leader who cares about his or her people, to take care of everyone in the team and ensure the slowest member can still come along and contribute meaningfully. If the leader only focuses on running fast and hitting the work targets but leaves people to fall behind and catch up on their own, people will feel that this leader does not care about others. In the long run, the team will be weakened as people lose their sense of purpose and morale and eventually look for other opportunities.

I have been uncommonly lucky, to have more than my fair share of good bosses and leaders, who have shaped me and my values. In my first job as an engineer, I made a wrong decision barely one week after starting work and it was a mistake that affected many people. I went to confess the mistake to my big boss, expecting to be given a huge reprimand but to my immense surprise, he told me that it was their fault, for not guiding and giving the proper support and supervision to someone so new. He then accompanied me to the site and sorted out the problems with all the affected parties. I have never forgotten the lesson and example that my big boss showed me by his actions all those years ago.

## In Conclusion: Define Your Leadership Journey

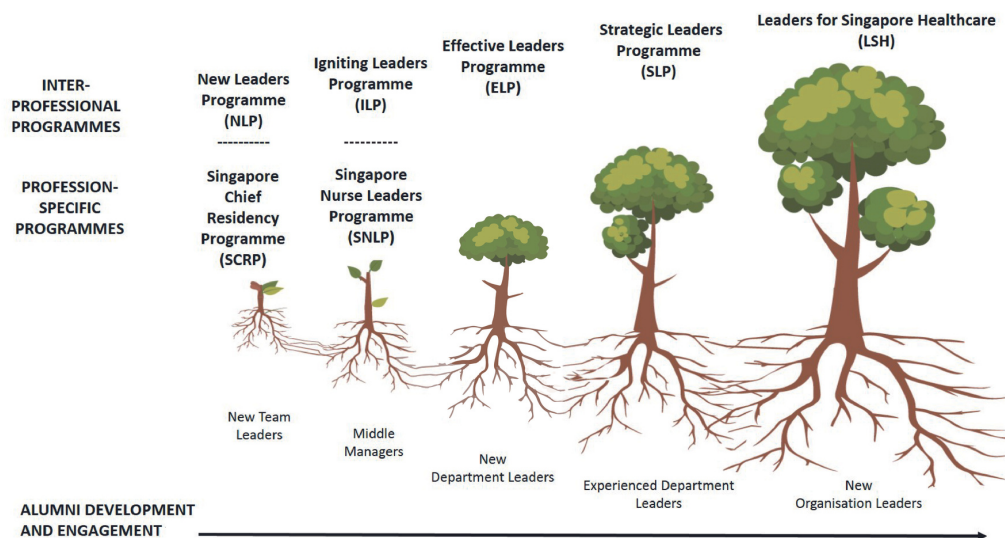
As leaders, all of us have the opportunities to shape outcomes and the culture in our teams. We have a big impact on many people, just as my first boss had on me. All of us want to do a good job. All of us want to find meaning in our work and our lives. All of us want to be valued and respected for our contributions. And all of us also want to be cared for as fellow human beings. Purpose and Care is how I have defined my leadership choices. I wish that all of you will be able to define your own leadership journey, guided by your values and what is important to you.



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# Leadership Milestone Programmes Cross-Profession



- Foster a one healthcare family mindset
- Build shared values and ethos amongst public healthcare leaders
- Develop understanding of key healthcare policies, the rationale and principles behind the policies
- Strengthen leadership capabilities of healthcare leaders to enable change and drive strategies to transform healthcare delivery
- Nurture a community of healthcare leaders across professions and across the healthcare family to bring about greater collaboration and sharing, and inspiration to the next generation of leaders

## NEW LEADERS PROGRAMME (NLP)



The New Leaders Programme (NLP) supports the development of high potential first time team leaders in the healthcare family.

The transition from being an individual contributor to leading a team is a significant and challenging milestone. The NLP encourages participants to explore their new role: How does the Singapore healthcare system work? What is my role in the larger healthcare system? What does it mean to lead? What does it mean to lead in the healthcare family?

Programme Manager(s):

Jennie Tan  
Carol Tang  
Nicole Lee

The NLP also provides opportunities for participants to network across healthcare institutions and professions.

## IGNITING LEADERS PROGRAMME (ILP)

The Igniting Leaders Programme (ILP) aims to strengthen participants' systems perspectives by providing opportunities for them to examine our healthcare philosophy and policy choices, and understand our larger strategic goals and priorities. This also helps participants understand one another's role in the healthcare system.

The ILP will enable participants to gain insight into their own leadership practice, especially in building their teams, and allows them to re-ignite their sense of purpose in healthcare. The ILP will also be an important platform for participants to foster peer support networks across healthcare institutions and professions.



Programme Manager:  
Chia Li Hui

## EFFECTIVE LEADERS PROGRAMME (ELP)



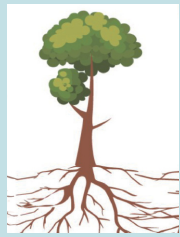
Programme Manager:  
Goh You Li

The Effective Leaders Programme (ELP) is designed to deepen participants' understanding of the healthcare system - its complexity and strategic direction, and widen their perspectives beyond the professional and institutional viewpoints.

The ELP also supports participants in reflecting on their personal leadership practice, and focus on driving change and building teams with a collective mission.

The programme emphasises the building of shared experiences and perspectives among participants, and fosters a trusted peer support community for mutual support and collaboration.

## STRATEGIC LEADERS PROGRAMME (SLP)



The Strategic Leaders Programme (SLP) will support our senior leaders to adopt a one healthcare mindset, and appreciate the importance of a whole of system approach that include perspectives beyond healthcare.

Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their collective leadership and collaborative practice as they lead larger and more diverse teams within and across healthcare institutions.

**Programme Manager:**  
Jared Koh

The SLP is also designed for participants to deepen networks and relationships among their peers to strengthen collaboration in the healthcare family.

## LEADERS FOR SINGAPORE HEALTHCARE (LSH)

The Leaders for Singapore Healthcare (LSH) is HLC's signature programme for senior healthcare leaders with organisational level responsibilities.

As senior healthcare leaders, participants will examine their roles as leaders of and for the Singapore health eco-system, with a larger influence across institutions and clusters, and beyond public healthcare.

The programme is conducted over four months, in four segments, and includes a study trip.



**Programme Manager:**  
Chu Min Lian

## Leadership Milestone Programmes Profession-Specific

### SINGAPORE CHIEF RESIDENCY PROGRAMME (SCRIP)



**Programme Manager(s):**  
Regine Tan  
Tan Hui

Singapore's healthcare landscape is evolving rapidly with new delivery systems, policies, and educational structures. In this time of transformation, effective physician leadership is essential, and the Singapore Chief Residency Programme (SCRIP) prepares tomorrow's doctors to meet these challenges, promote excellence in the medical education, and advance Singapore's Public Healthcare System.

### SINGAPORE NURSE LEADERS PROGRAMME (SNLP)

The Singapore Nurse Leaders Programme (SNLP) is developed as part of the Future Nursing Career Review Committee's (FNCRC) recommendation to equip future nursing leaders with prior experience in community care before progressing to take on higher leadership positions.

With an increasingly system-level approach towards nursing at the RHS-level, the programme is designed to equip nurses with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead care across multiple facilities- acute and community sectors. The SNLP aims to groom level 2 nurse leaders to be change agents with strong leadership and policy perspectives, and this is achieved via a 2-prong approach, in-person seminars and attachment to the community care sector.



**Programme Manager:**  
Maryse Koh

## Alumni Programmes

The College also hosts events and talks for alumni of its milestone programmes, such as fireside chats with senior healthcare leaders, policy workshops, and learning journeys. Alumni events are open by invitation only, and most fees are fully subsidised by the Healthcare Leadership College.

**Programme Manager(s):**  
Goh You Li  
Chu Min Lian  
Nicole Lee  
Chia Li Hui

## The HLC Team



1<sup>st</sup> Row (Bottom from left to right): Kathlyn, Dennis, Sandra, Shiao Wei, Pacillia.

2<sup>nd</sup> Row (From left to right): Jennie, Nicole, Hui, Yvonne, Regine, Min Lian, You Li, Li Hui, Jared, Maryse, Carol.

# ABOUT THE HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP COLLEGE

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

We aspire to be a keystone and trusted partner in developing leaders of and for Singapore healthcare, and in building bridges and growing community across agencies, clusters, institutions and professions in the Singapore healthcare ecosystem.

Find out more here: [www.hlc.mohh.com.sg](http://www.hlc.mohh.com.sg)

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Assistant Executive, HLC

We hope you enjoy the newsletter. The next issue of Leading Healthcare will be in June 2023. We welcome your feedback and suggestions. Do drop the Leading Healthcare team a note at [hlc@mohh.com.sg](mailto:hlc@mohh.com.sg).

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