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CMAAO – scientific report – Primary Care

The Singapore experience

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What is primary care?

- Keywords used by World Health Organization (WHO)
 - first-contact, accessible, continuous, comprehensive, coordinated, person-focused
- Important reminders for doctors, who may be overwhelmed by sheer volume of patients, on the fundamentals of primary care

<https://www.who.int/teams/integrated-health-services/clinical-services-and-systems/primary-care>



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Brief history of primary care initiatives in Singapore

- Polyclinic system
 - First polyclinic, former Queenstown polyclinic, opened in 1963
 - Polyclinics provide subsidised primary care and also referral to specialist doctors in hospitals
 - currently 23 polyclinics in Singapore, target of 32 polyclinics by 2030
 - Dental services available at selected polyclinics
 - Often long waiting times

<https://www.moh.gov.sg/resources-statistics/healthcare-institution-statistics/waiting-times-for-registration-and-for-consultation-at-polyclinics>



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Brief history of primary care initiatives in Singapore [con't]

- Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS)
 - Allow Singapore citizens to enjoy government subsidies at private primary care clinics which participate in the CHAS scheme, for specific medical conditions
 - Part of distributing workload away from polyclinics

<https://www.chas.sg/>



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Brief history of primary care initiatives in Singapore [con't]

Primary Care Networks (PCN)

Network of GPs in the PCN

Patient-facing services by/ through PCN

Team-based care for ancillary services
(For chronic disease management)

Diabetic Foot Screening

Diabetic Eye Screening

Nurse Counselling



Backend services by PCN

Admin Support provided
(e.g. primary care coordinator, admin executive)

Chronic Disease Registry

Care coordination

Monitoring of clinical outcomes

Primary Care Networks



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<https://www.moh.gov.sg/home/our-healthcare-system/healthcare-services-and-facilities/primary-care-networks>

Brief history of primary care initiatives in Singapore [con't]

- Public Health Preparedness Clinic (PHPC)
 - primary care response to public health emergencies such as the influenza pandemic, haze and anthrax outbreak into a single scheme for better management.
 - also activated during severe haze in 2015
 - After activation, participating clinics receive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from Ministry of Health, and also priority access to antivirals, antibiotics, and/or vaccines from national stockpile
 - Activated during COVID-19



<https://www.primarycarepages.sg/schemes-and-programmes/public-health-preparedness-clinic>

Brief history of primary care initiatives in Singapore [con't]

- Family Physician scheme
 - Primary care doctors who qualify, can use the term Family Physician, part of process to recognise family medicine / primary care as a “specialty”
 - 2011 - establishment of Register of Family Physicians
 - Grandfathering clause at beginning of scheme, to allow experienced primary care doctors the opportunity to be accredited, via practice route

<https://www.healthprofessionals.gov.sg/fpab>



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Contributions by SMA

- Background: 3 major medical associations in Singapore
 - Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS)
 - College of Family Physicians, Singapore (CFPS)
 - Singapore Medical Association (SMA)
- The 3 professional bodies work closely together, to complement each other
- Primary care efforts are usually handled by CFPS



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Contributions by SMA [con't]

- Sold PPE to doctors/clinics during initial mask shortage during COVID-19
- Joint AMS-CFPS-SMA survey on public sentiments towards the National Electronic Health Record
- Articles and thematic issues on primary care in SMA News
- Provided quickstart guide to Telemedicine, to help doctors in primary care
- Train-and-place scheme to train clinic assistants for clinics

<https://www.sma.org.sg/news/2018/August/joint-survey-on-the-public-sentiments-towards-the-national-electronic-health-record>



Current status [as of Jun 2023]

- Healthier SG
 - new empanelment programme for entire population, patient to choose 1 family medicine clinic as his/her designated clinic
 - Switch to capitation model for public healthcare institutions
 - Population health measures, e.g. exercise prescription, working with other professions, e.g. physiotherapists, dietitians, etc.



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Current status [as of Jun 2023] [con't]

- National Electronic Health Records
 - Upcoming Health Information Bill, when passed into law, will likely mandate compulsory participation in National Electronic Health Records system
 - Will clinics be ready for implementation?



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Looking forward

- Is primary care ready for aging population in Singapore?
- How do we take care of current generation of solo primary care doctors, who are approaching retirement?
- How can private primary care clinics sustain financially, with pressures of inflation and competition?
- Primary care doctors often seen as less “glamorous” compared to specialist doctors. How do we encourage the next generation of doctors to pursue primary care?



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