

E D I T O R I A L

A belated Happy Year of the Rooster to all our GS members....from President Henry Lim. We rounded up the Year of the Monkey with an **Annual Gerontological Seminar 2004** on 18 December at York Hotel for our members as well as for the public.

The response was overwhelming. A total of 138 participants attended. There were six presentations altogether – the wide ranging topics were interesting, showcasing GS commitment to the development of gerontology in Singapore: -

- **The New Old: Good News of Ageing** by Prof Kua Ee Heok
- **Managing the Ageing Population** by Prof Victor Goh
- **Traditional Medicine and the Elderly** by A/Prof Ng Tzu Pin
- **Bridging Changing Demography** by Mr Laurence Wee
- **Determinants of Nursing Home Placement** by Ms Diana Koh
- **Carers of Elderly with Dementia** by Dr. Chow Yeow Leng.

(We have included in this issue a brief summary of the above presentations).

ANNUAL GS SEMINAR 2004 *highlights*

Our panel of speakers...



Prof Kua reported the findings from a 2002 study which purported that all is not “gloom and doom” on growing old. Findings showed that about 2/3 of the elderly were satisfied with life. Some 69% engaged in exercise, 95% kept up with current events by watching television and listening to radio while 49%, through reading newspaper. 81% reported “good to mild” in their ability to perform activities of daily living. 90% of our old folks continued to live with their family.

Prof Ng Tze Pin reported some findings from a longitudinal Ageing Study on the use of traditional medicine by elderly persons. Problems cited for of herbal use in elderly persons were:- adverse effects from drug interactions from concurrent use of modern Western and Complementary herbal medicines; increased risk of serious drug toxicity because of impaired renal function and herbal medicines are often adulterated with toxic heavy metals and

undeclared Western drugs like steroid and antibiotics. Out of a sample of two thousand and ten, traditional medicines are used by a quarter of elderly people in Singapore (n=503, 25%), and out of these 503 subjects, 262 (52%) used Western prescription medicines concurrently. Use of traditional medicines is determined positively and negatively by psychosocial, health and help-seeking behaviour factors. Cited positive factors are strong social support and regular Tai Qi. Meaning the stronger the social support, the more extensively traditional medicine is used. Those who performed regular exercise and Tai Qi are also more likely to use traditional medicine. However, the negatively cited factors for use of traditional medicine are arthritis, cancer, currently smoking, using sleeping pills, disabilities, those who have chronic medical conditions but visited doctor less often than once every 6 months.”

Laurence Wee highlighted on emerging demographic trends, including the Inter-Ministerial Committee’s (IMC) findings on the ageing population problem in Singapore. According to IMC, Singapore will be among the fastest ageing populations in the next 30 years. The challenge in bridging the changing demography will be in addressing the changing needs of the elderly and providing opportunities for positive contribution to society, the elderly being a repository of experience and resource.

He showcased the experience of Evergreen Circle Neighbourhood Link (a project of Presbyterian Community Services at Tampines St 81) in coming up the following with innovative solutions in bridging the generational gap. Most notable were programmes initiated by students from the three schools;

- Befriender Service - St Hilda’s Secondary
- Home Maintenance - ITE Tampines
- Small Group Activities - Junyuan Secondary.

Through these projects students are given the opportunity to not only practice empathy towards the elderly but develop a compassion for the frail and vulnerable seniors as well. Opportunities are also abound for the technical students to help them in simple household maintenance and repairs. Such exchanges break down barriers and build mutual trust and understanding between the two generations.

He concluded that the experience of the students at Evergreen Circle could be emulated on a wider scale. In this way, the message that can be effectively brought across will be that:

“No one should be marginalized from society just because they happen to live longer.”



The Audience in rapt attention...



Prof Victor Goh speaks...

Dr. Chow Yew Leng reported the findings of an exploratory study of the needs and concerns of home carers of elderly with dementia. Carers' issues such as their needs, resources for coping alongside the trajectory of the disease and their future concerns towards caring were identified. Resentment, helplessness, frustration, worries and guilt were myriad of emotions felt by the carers in their caring process. However, these feelings were mitigated by strong support from family members, friends, religious faiths and adequate information. The results suggested that services needed are on an individual basis.

Diana Koh reported on an exploratory study that seeks to explore what influence the family of the elderly sick was in seeking their option of nursing home admission for loved ones and factors that accounted for the difference in their decision on choice of care, institutional or otherwise.



Diana Koh speaks...

The emerging major factors that affect nursing home admission among the nursing home applicants (NH samples) are found to be: dementia diagnosis and gross functional loss, history of abuse, history of non-support, caregiver strain & perception of unequal share of care of parents, and alienation due to caregiver's multiple marriages.

The factors that work for home-care option found among the non-nursing home (NNH) comparison group are: helping behaviours, care-recipient's personality, spousal / intergenerational

support, history of past responsible parenting, filial piety, practising religious belief, and life-long spousal commitment.

This study has shown that the majority of caregivers' response to decision on care option of elderly sick is dependent on the degree of bond/relationship between them.

Many choose home-care for as long as they could, or until such time when the elderly sick's medical/nursing goes beyond their ability to care.

The implications to Social Work practice and policy making are discussed eg. the close networking with the community & governmental levels, and the developing of clinical social work assessment of elderly/caregiver to optimise dynamic internal resources eg. relationship, resilience; & matching of external resources for them.

Note : The presentations in two parts, were chaired by Mr Henry Lim and Professor Emeritus Kiang Ai Kim, respectively.



On Retirement...



by Ellen Cheng (GS Council Member)

Lately the issue of retirement is often mentioned in the press, “To retire or not to retire”, is the hot question.

“For us, retirement is not from work, but from the world.”

~ 88 year old agricultural worker in Africa

This quotation was shared by Professor Monica Ferreira, in her plenary lecture “Advancing Income Security in Developing Countries -Focus on Africa” at the 7th Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing (IEA), held in Singapore, 4-7 September, 2004 at Suntec City.

The word “retirement” has had people saying “The word ‘retirement’ is not in my vocabulary. I will work till I die.” And, very recently someone opined “The word ‘retirement’ should not be in the dictionary!”


Ironically, these comments are from people who can well afford to choose whether to retire or not.

For them, retirement is an option, unlike the 88-year-old agricultural worker in Africa. He has no retirement benefits or old age providence of any kind. This statement, made by someone resigned to a lifetime of working to survive, sounds sad.

However, on a more positive note, we can say “Retirement from work does not mean retirement from the world.” Retirees who are fortunate enough to have income security, when they reach the official age of retirement could choose to live this way.

It is indeed heartening to see evidence of the spirit of not retiring from service and contribution to society manifested in volunteerism at the IFA Conference. Among the volunteers helping at the conference were a number of retirees. Instead of simply enjoying the fruits of their labour, in their retirement years, they contributed their precious time in voluntary service to make the conference a success. Indeed these senior citizens are role models of non-retirement from the World.

There are many good examples abound of retirees in Singapore, volunteering their services in various ways with different Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), working together to help their less fortunate Singaporeans.

Kudos to these people who are generous with their time (and perhaps money) and who have, though retired from work, but not from the World. Again these big-hearted retirees are great role models and an inspiration for their fellow Singaporeans, fellow senior citizens and the younger generation, who are at various stages in the journey of *Successful Ageing*. 

PUBLIC SEMINAR
Organised by Gerontological Society of Singapore
A G E I N G

Questions you always want to ask the experts...

23 April 2005 (Sat) 2 to 5 pm
YWCA, Pool Terrace,
6 Fort Canning Lodge, Singapore 179494

Chairpersons

Mr Henry Lim, BBM, President, Gerontological Society
Professor Kua Ee Heok, Dept of Psychological Medicine, NUS

2pm

Registration

2.30pm

Prof Victor Goh

Anti-ageing agents: myths and misconceptions
Dept of Obs & Gynae, NUS

Dr Hilary Thean

Denture and dental care in old age
Dept of Restorative Dentistry,

Prof Shamal Das De

Backache, soft bones and osteoporosis
Dept of Orthopaedic Surgery, NUS

Organised by:



4.30pm

Tea Reception

5pm

End of Programme

Sponsored by:



Registration:

Members: \$8.00 / Non Members: \$10.00

Please make cheque payable to 'Gerontological Society' with your name and contact number and mail to: Allan Choo, 5 Mayflower Terrace, Singapore 568550

For enquiries please call Allan Choo at 64525085 / Richard at 63775183

Registration

I wish to sign up:

Name _____ **Tel** _____

Address _____

Amount of Cheque enclosed: _____ **Signature** _____

announcement

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) 8th Global Conference is to be held on the 30 May - 2 June 2006 in Copenhagen, Denmark. For more information, please visit website: <http://global-ageing.dk>.

Falls can be prevented...

About 1 in 6 people aged 60 years and above, suffers a fall each year. Falls can be prevented. Practicing good home safety measure can save your life. To find out more, log on to: www.hpb.gov.sg/health_articles/home_safety/

Jokes:

Clever Old Ladies!

A tour bus takes off with a full load of senior citizens. Soon after, a little old lady taps the bus driver on the shoulder. She offers him a handful of almonds, which he gratefully munches up.

After about 15 minutes, she taps him on the shoulder again and hands him another handful of almonds. She repeats this gesture many times.

The driver finally has to ask the old lady why she and her elderly friends don't eat the almonds themselves, whereupon she replies that it's not possible because of their false teeth.

"We're not able to chew them."

"Why do you buy them then?" the driver asks, feeling puzzled whereupon the old lady answers: "Oh, we just love the chocolate around them!"

Editorial Board : Dr. Chow Yeow Leng
Mr Laurence Wee
Mr Henry Lim
Mr Seen Keen Fai

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