

## From the Secretary's Desk:

There is an awful lot going on in the world right now, but for the older Malaysian today the world is more upside down than it is for many other segments of society. Here is a brief tour of what is happening now in Geriatric Medicine in Malaysia and the MSGM's role in continuing to champion for better health and healthcare for the older Malaysians:

### COVID-19 and the Older Malaysian

It is undeniable that older persons are far more likely to die from COVID-19, with those over 60s making up 70% of all deaths from COVID-19. Our Ministry of Health (MOH) Geriatricians have continued to play an active role in supporting MOH policies with regards to treatment decisions and long-term management. There is now a dedicated geriatric COVID-19 hospital located at Hospital Rehabilitasi Cheras, led by Dr Rizah Mazzuin Razali. Our geriatricians all over Malaysia continue to play active roles in their respective states in caring for older patients with COVID-19. However, COVID-19 not just an acute disease and it is now established that long-term consequences are common, and, yes, even more common in older adults. The MOH Post COVID-19 Management Protocol owes Dr Elizabeth Chong and Dr Alan Pok, our geriatricians in Hospital Kuala Lumpur, for their contributions towards our data collation.

### COVID-19 and Care Homes

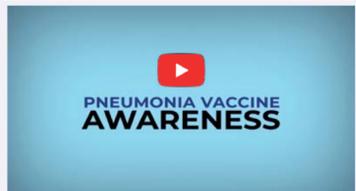
Unfortunately, care home outbreaks are continuing to occur. Our President and Executive Committee continue to conduct negotiations with various stakeholders to increase awareness on the plight of care homes. Care home outbreaks are flagged by District Health Offices, followed by rapid screening and removal of positive cases.

### COVID-19 Vaccination of Older Persons and Care Home Residents:

Our MOH geriatricians have been also busy contributing to pre-vaccination assessment and ensuring eligibility of all older adults except those who are actively dying. We are pleased that nearly all those who registered have now received their vaccines. Care homes which submitted line listings now have residents mostly either received their first doses or appointments for their first dose. However, hold-ups are still being reported in some districts, particularly Petaling District which has the biggest number of care homes. However, we must not congratulate ourselves yet, since there are many older individuals who have not registered for the vaccines and many unregistered care homes which have not come forward. Please do continue encouraging all your patients and care homes you know to register.

### Vaccination and Older Persons

Why stop at COVID-19 vaccines? To complement our recent joint Position Statement with MIWG and MSIDC on Influenza Vaccination, our trainees, led by Dr Toh Zeng Yang, embarked on a project to produce a video advising our public to also consider influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations, funded by a generous educational grant from Pfizer.



### Other non-COVID Concerns

Do remember it is not all just about COVID-19 and vaccines. It has become more critical than ever to secure the future of healthcare for older adults. We would like to congratulate the UMMC Fracture Liaison Service for getting a Bronze Standard from the International Osteoporosis Foundation for the Capture the Fracture programme. Dr Toh Zeng Yan steps down as our trainee representative to be replaced by Dr Sarah Iyang Kiyu, who has written the feature article of this newsletter. The MSGM is also embarking on a joint project with MIWG and MSIDC to develop Guidelines for Prevention of Influenza in Older Adults. The Malaysian Congress of Geriatric Medicine yet again takes a virtual form over a packed three days, including a pocket meeting for the Asia-Pacific Geriatric Conference, on 19-21 August 2021. Our Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, 21 August 2021, the third day of the Congress. Thank you, Dr Hakimah Sallehuddin and Dr Nor Azlina Abu Bakar, our organising and scientific chairs, for putting together the gripping programme.

## COVID-19 and its Impact on Older Malaysians: a Personal Experience

By Dr Sarah Iyang Kiyu

The COVID-19 pandemic that is still raging globally as well as in Malaysia has had a huge impact on the lives of ordinary citizens in terms of their social, economic and health status.

The elderly population has been hit hardest by the changes brought about by COVID-19. From the disease aspect, older adults may have two or more comorbidities that make them more susceptible to COVID-19 infections as well as having more severe forms of it.

In terms of mortality, for instance, nearly a third of COVID-19 deaths in Malaysia have been among those aged 50-64 years. Globally, those aged 80 years and above have the highest fatality rates. In Malaysia, the death rate is 17.3% for the above 80 age group [1].

While vaccination is not a magic bullet to control the pandemic, it does play a crucial role in preventing severe disease and deaths due to COVID-19. In Malaysia, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation has said that 60% of senior citizens who registered under the National COVID-19 immunisation programme should receive at least one dose by mid-June 2021 [2]. He said 2,256,257 senior citizens have registered and of this total, 855,124 have received their first dose. Another 436,244 individuals have received their appointments until 15 June. The remaining senior citizens will be given their appointments as soon as possible.

All these statistics, however, do not reflect the depths of turmoil that COVID-19 has inflicted on the lives of ordinary Malaysians, especially the older age groups. From the social aspect, older adults have difficulties with digital technology in terms of skills or accessibility, thus limiting their connection to the outside world.

Only through our personal experiences are we able to comprehend how COVID-19 has up-ended the lives of the older population. A case in point is my uncle's mother-in-law, whom we call PoPo. A widow, she has been a nursing home resident for the past three years. She voluntarily asked to stay in a nursing home so as not to burden her children even though they all wanted to take turns caring for her.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, all PoPo's children and grandchildren would visit her a few times a week at the nursing home, bringing her food and keeping her company. I also went to see PoPo with my family. She was very happy to see us. We brought her the food she loved, her essentials, some newspapers and kept her company. I also saw how the other nursing home residents interacted and did activities such as light exercises to keep themselves healthy. PoPo had bilateral knee osteoarthritis, so she was unable to participate much during those physical activities. Her mood and disposition remained cheerful, however, and she was always able to call her family if she felt lonely or wanted to see them. Over the weekends, her children took turns to bring her out for brunch or just enjoy the day with them.

Since March 2020 when a nationwide lockdown was first imposed, visitors have not been allowed at PoPo's nursing home. Her children are only allowed to bring her food and essential items. If any resident with medical problems need attention, an in-house doctor will attend to their needs. Residents who need to go for medical follow-ups will be brought for their appointments by the nursing staff.

PoPo is fortunate in that she can use her handphone to keep in contact with her family. Her children take turns to video-call her during the weekends and sometimes on weekdays to make sure she does not feel lonely. Although PoPo has never articulated her feelings and how she is coping during this difficult period, her loneliness and longing to see her family can be seen by her actions during the recent Gawai celebrations in early June 2021. On that day, PoPo called each of my uncle's family members (there are five of them) to talk to them and wish them a Happy Gawai. Even though PoPo herself does not celebrate Gawai, she remembered the festival and connected with my uncle and aunt.

PoPo's children and their extended families are also affected by the restrictions that COVID-19 has put on the time spent with their beloved mother and grandmother. They can no longer see her face-to-face, go on outings with her and generally spend time with her. COVID-19 has robbed them of the remaining precious time they can spend with her. As they are a close-knit family, this has affected them emotionally. They also worry about how she is coping in the home as she does not voice her worries and fears. All they can hope is that the nursing home staff would become her surrogate family and take care of her as best as they can.

On a personal level, my experience with PoPo has made me understand a little deeper how the COVID-19 pandemic has made huge changes in the way our older Malaysians have to live life now. Social isolation, loneliness, difficulties with using new technological gadgets and their fear of vaccination are just some of the issues they must deal with. It is therefore important that we support them, especially emotionally, during this trying time.

#### References

1. Tang, J and Tung, C (2021). Death among 50 to 64 high. The Star, 15 May 2021. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/05/15/death-among-50-to-64-high>
2. Kaos, J and Tang, A (2021). Khairy: 60% of 2.2 million seniors who signed up for vaccination will have received first jab by mid-June. The Star, 9 June 2021. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/09/covid-19-three-out-of-five-among-the-elderly-will-have-received-first-jab-by-mid-june-says-khairy>

## Update on eMCGM

There will be a Photography and Video Competition held in conjunction with the eMCGM 2021 entitled Ageing with Resilience in the face of Covid-19. Please refer to competition details below and feel free to participate. Winners of the competition will receive attractive cash prizes. For more information, please click <https://mcmq.msgm.com.my/em-cgm2021-photo-video-competition/>

For more information on eMCGM 2021, please visit <http://mcmq.msgm.com.my>



## We would like to Welcome the following new members who have joined MSGM as of May 2021:

- Prof Madya Dr Devinder Kaur Ajit Singh, senior lecturer, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
- Dr Mohamad Hasif Jaafar, senior lecturer, Universiti Teknologi Mara
- Dr Grace Low Sook Hoon, consultant physician, Sunway Medical Centre
- Siti Mallissa Mohd Shariff, pharmacist, Sungai Buloh Hospital
- Waidah Awatan, nursing lecturer, Universiti Sabah Malaysia
- Yasohdha Anne, lecturer, Management & Science University

## Membership fee reminder

Associate members of MSGM are reminded to pay annual membership fee of RM100 for 2021 via online transfer to the following :

**Account Name** : Persatuan Perubatan Geriatrik Malaysia  
**Bank** : Maybank Berhad  
**Account Number** : 5141 6113 3358

Associate Members are only eligible to attend the MSGM Annual General Meeting on 21 August 2021 with full payment of the membership fee for 2021.

## Other announcements

- The University of Southampton** in United Kingdom has requested our assistance to announce its multi-disciplinary degree programmes and short courses in the field of Gerontology / Global Ageing. The courses are conducted in a flexible manner: full-time or part-time; fully distance-learning, face-to-face or blended delivery. Scholarships are available. For more details, please contact Gerontology Admissions Tutor, Prof Athina Vlachantoni. Email: [A.Vlachantoni@soton.ac.uk](mailto:A.Vlachantoni@soton.ac.uk).

**Sunway University** offers Postgraduate Diploma for Primary Care for the Elderly led by Prof ii. Datin Dr Chia Yoke Chin. Our MSGM members have been assisting with the programme modules.

Next intake (third batch): January 2022. To find out more visit: <https://university.sunway.edu.my/smls/primary-elderly-care>