

# **THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF DOCTORS TO THE CARE OF THE AGED**

**(Paper presented at the Silver Jubilee  
National Medical Convention 1985)**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Many doctors are already involved in Community Service. A survey of affiliates of the Singapore Council of Social Service revealed that 399 doctors were actively involved in community service. This was in 1981. During that year, another 38 doctors volunteered for Community service and were referred to the various service clubs, such as Rotary and Lions Clubs. Involvement in the care of the aged and aged sick included the running of Old People's Homes, SAGE, Community Centre Free Clinics, Day Care Centres and Free Clinics of several religious organisations. Contribution was also made through the various service Clubs, and religious organisations by way of home visits, cash donations, and free medicine. Every so often, our members have been called upon to assist the Singapore Professional Centre, the People's Association and other organisations by giving talks on health care of the aged, and giving advice on the planning for such care.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Although doctors themselves are aware that many from within the profession are actively involved in community service, this fact is not publicly known. This is because doctors do not publicise their activities — they are not encouraged to do so by their Ethical Code.

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## METHODS

In 1981 a survey of the affiliate societies and associations of the Singapore Council of Social Service revealed that 399 doctors were already actively involved in community service. This did not include those organisations which did not belong to the Council. At the same time, 38 more doctors volunteered for community service that year, and were referred to the various voluntary service clubs. Many doctors were already involved with organisations of a medical nature such as:

The Red Cross Society  
The National Kidney Foundation  
The Singapore Diabetic Society  
The Association for E.S.N. (Educationally Sub-normal)  
The Children's Aid Society  
The Singapore Association for the Blind  
The Singapore Association for the Deaf  
The Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association  
St John's Ambulance Brigade  
The Cancer Society

Other organisations which had often called on the help of doctors in their projects were the Singapore Professional Centre, and the People's Association. Such projects included health-screening, health talks, anti-smoking campaigns, anti-drug abuse activities.

In September 1984, the Singapore Medical Association carried out another survey among members on their contribution to the health care for the aged. A well-planned questionnaire was sent to all members to complete within one month.

## RESULTS

One hundred and twenty-seven replies were received. 73 (57.5%) said they were already involved in the health care for the aged, besides seeing and treating aged patients in their own practices. 54 (42.5%) were not already involved.

When asked about charges, 73 said they were already giving special considerations to the aged poor. 59 were prepared to do free examinations whenever asked to do so. Of those who did not agree to doing free examinations, 18 said they were prepared to do so at a nominal charge. One doctor reported that he had stopped doing free examinations because the offer was being abused. Quite a number said that those aged patients who were being supported by their relatives should not be given special consideration.

Of the 59 who were prepared to do free examinations, 51 said they were prepared to do this in a community centre. The remaining felt that the community centre would not be the proper set-up for a clinic.

## INVOLVEMENT

The involvement of members was either on an ad hoc basis, providing services when called upon, or on a regular basis, as members of voluntary organizations, religious groups, old people's homes, and day care centres. In either manner, the services provided were as follows:

## SERVICE PROVIDED

Visiting Homes	32 members
Free Medical Examination in their Clinics	31 members
Raising Funds	25 members
Day Care Centres	3 members
Other Services	18 members

## VISITING HOMES

Regular visits to Old People's Homes are made by doctors. Examples of this type of service provided are:

### Visiting Homes

Staff members of the Dept. of Social Medicine and Public Health visit the Villa Francis Home weekly.

Doctors hold a medical clinic for the Bo Tian Home for the Aged and Aged Sick.

Doctors visit and provide free medical treatment for the Ling Kwang Home for Senior Citizens, Serangoon Gardens.

Doctors visit the Home for the Aged Sick in Payoh Lai, three times a year.

Monthly visits to the St Joseph's Old Folks' Home in Jurong.

Doctors are on the Board of Visitors of the Social Welfare Homes for the Aged.

Doctors visit the Salvation Army Lee Kuo Chuan Home for the Aged fortnightly.

Doctors form the Panel of Medical Specialists of the Evergreen Home for the Aged in Sin Min.

Honorary Consultants to the Singapore Cheshire Home and other old People's Homes.

## RUNNING HOMES/CENTRES

Besides visiting homes, some doctors are also chairmen and vice-chairmen of these homes and centres. Some are founders of these homes. Dr Lim Chan Yong's pioneer efforts with the Singapore Action Group for Elders are legend. Examples of this category of services are:

### Running Homes/Centres

Chairman, Day Care Centre for the Elderly, Bukit Merah View

Lions Home for Elders (Ang Mo Kio)

Lions Home for Aged Sick (Toa Payoh)

Senior Citizens Recreation Centre

Vice-Chairman, St John's Home for the Aged and Honorary Medical Officer for the Home

Vice-Chairman, Rochor Kongsu for the Aged, since its inception in 1976, and Honorary Medical Officer SAGE (Singapore Action Group for Elders)

Ling Kwang Home for Senior Citizens

## FREE EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT

In their Clinics, doctors do give free medical examinations and treatment, when necessary. The following types of patients were cited:

### **Free Examination and Treatment**

Patients from Old People's Homes  
Patients Recommended by Nearby Church  
Patients from St Vincent de Paul's Society  
Patients from Senior Citizens' Group of the Community Centre  
Bukit Merah Old Folks' Club, on a Rotation Basis with other volunteer doctors (Friday evenings)

### **PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION**

Doctors are frequently asked to give talks on the health care of the aged at seminars and community centres. Other forms of health education are:

#### **Public Health Education**

Instructing Senior Citizens on How to Exercise Regularly  
Diabetic Education through Singapore Diabetic Society  
Singapore Masters Track & Field Assn, Athletic Club for the Elderly (Annual Meet for participants under aged-graded groupings)

#### **Fund Raising**

Another way of helping the aged is to raise funds for the aged poor. The following channels of raising funds have been used:

Community Chest  
Voluntary Organisations  
Old People's Homes  
Religious Organisations

#### **Organisations**

The main organisations through which doctors do voluntary service are (i) service clubs, (ii) Religious Organisations and (iii) Community Centres. Examples of these organisations' activities are given below:

#### **SERVICE CLUBS**

Lions Club	50 inmates of Christian Home for the Aged (Upper Thomson Road) looked after.
Y's Men's Club	Team of doctors responsible for the Health Care of inmates in the Sri Narayana Mission Home for the Chronic Aged Sick
Apex Club	Visiting Consultant to Day Care Centre for Elderly
Rotary Club	Visits to Homes

### **RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS**

Executive member of a Religious Organisation that helps Aged.

Visiting the Methodist Home for the Aged once every 2 months.

Visiting and caring for 4 aged men, monthly, under Church Social Concern Programmes.

The Presbyterian Old People's Home.

### **COMMUNITY CENTRES**

Community Centre Free Clinics, e.g. Kallang, Bukit Merah

Talks on Health Care of Aged

### **AD HOC SERVICES**

Other ad hoc services provided in the past have been many and varied. Examples of these are:

People's Association: Senior Citizens' Week

— Health Screening

— Lectures

— Exhibits

Ministry of Health: Howe Yoon Chong Report

— SMA and APMPs and others helped in the medical aspects

Singapore Professional Centre: Health Screening

Medical Screening During Epidemics

### **DISCUSSION**

The above lists of voluntary activities are by no means exhaustive. They were compiled from returns received from the circulation of a questionnaire. Those doctors who are actively involved in the care of the aged and who did not complete and return the questionnaire are therefore not included in this study. A few of the doctors who replied were exceptionally committed:

#### **One Doctor**

Visits SATS Old People's Home, and gives free treatment

Attends to Kallang CC Free Clinic

Visits Nightingale Nursing Home for Aged Sick

Attends to Red Cross Free Clinic