

# A DOCTOR WITH A **MISSION**

Obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Chua Yang says the best part of her job is the privilege of having “long-term relationships with my patients and to grow up and grow old with them”.

“Believe it or not, I have wanted to be a doctor since I was 3 years old!” says Obstetrician & Gynaecologist Dr Chua Yang, who recently moved her 12-year-old private practice to the newly revamped Mount Alvernia Medical Centre D.

Of course, a child’s dream must also be nurtured with the right training. “Through medical school and training, I discovered my love for the surgical fields and I realised that I had great appreciation of anatomical planes as well as very steady hands, all makings of a good surgeon,” notes Dr Chua. “However, I love the idea also of being able to have long-term relationships with patients and to grow up and grow old with them! Obstetrics and gynaecology absolutely encompass all of these factors.”

## **The People’s Doctor**

The most interesting thing about being an obstetrician and gynaecologist, she reckons, is that there is no “regular” day. “There are clinic hours when I sit down with patients and try to address their concerns, but there are many other times throughout the day that I may get called when a patient is in labour. This happens even in the middle of the night because we can’t decide when a baby feels like seeing the world for the first time! There are also elective and emergency surgeries now and then.”

Dr Chua, who has just completed two terms as president of the Menopause Research Society of Singapore and is the medical advisor of “Woman to Woman” Menopause Support Group, is also the current president of the Asia Pacific Menopause Federation. “When I began these commitments in the field of menopause, it was still a phase of life that women did not want to acknowledge or talk about,” said Dr Chua. She started the journey trying to increase awareness both in women as well as their doctors caring for them. “The focus was to improve everyone’s knowledge about menopause and understand all the non-medical as well as medical options for disease prevention, symptom relief and graceful aging through and beyond menopause.”

She has also volunteered for medical mission work for the past decade. “When women are better educated about health and disease prevention, their entire household and next generation benefits.” So far, she has volunteered in Niger, Zambia, Nepal, Ladakh, Bangalore, Sichuan, Qinghai, and parts of Indonesia to provide medical care for under-served women.

In Ladakh, she started a women’s healthcare project in 2009, which has become her most sustainable mission work; she has returned six times over the last few years. “In this very remote



place, the community may not be the poorest but they are so inaccessible that it is hard to bring medical care to everyone, and equally hard for someone in the village to get to a reasonable medical care provider," says Dr Chua. Her first visit in 2009 saw only 50 women coming forward for

check-ups. The following year, Dr Chua returned with a colleague to see 200 patients; the next year, her team increased to three – and they reached out to almost 2,000 patients!

"Many women got to hear of the cervical cancer screening and prevention programme that we conduct and would walk for hours to come get screened when we are there. The continuous education, health talks that we conduct as well as the teaching to the local healthcare providers, have tremendously improved the trust and belief in the work that we do," says Dr Chua with satisfaction. "What we have achieved is an awareness and motivation for the women there to improve their own health and take charge of their choices. These changes have long lasting impact."

### Doctor, writer, and more

On top of that, she writes for many health and women's magazines, gives health talks and also serves past and present, in the Obstetrical & Gynaecological Society of Singapore, the Association of Women Doctors (Singapore) and Osteoporosis Society of Singapore. How does she cope with everything?

"I am a firm believer of living life passionately and giving everything my best shot! No one feels tired during a holiday or while having fun. Many will feel tired the minute they are returning to work after a break! Well, life's like that. If you believe in the work that you do and derive pleasure and satisfaction from what you can contribute towards these causes, then work becomes fun and rewarding and less tiring," she shares.

In her practice, writing and speaking, health education has always been her priority. "Women should be armed with good information to help themselves take charge of their lifestyle, health and happiness choices," advocates Dr Chua.

For example, when she sees a woman through her pregnancy, they often spend time talking about her own lifestyle choices and how that may impact her child-to-be. "Parents disciplined in their work life balance and make good decisions about diet and regular exercises, will influence their kids also to be fun loving who are able to work hard and play hard," stresses Dr Chua. "Parents who

get home late from work and complaining about life endlessly, however, may have kids who are not motivated with school and work as life in the future is not attractive to them. Similarly parents who snack on junk food and sugar treats all the time have very little effectiveness trying to convince their kids that junk food and sugars are bad."

"Showing a good example is the most powerful tool in parenting. When I talk and write about these concepts and offer a point of view, it is rewarding to see young parents-to-be take notice and start conversations about their game plans to be the best parents they can be. The possibility that not just the health of the patient, but that of her spouse and unborn child may all benefit from a chat, is really exciting for me!" enthuses Dr Chua.

She gives so much of her time to so many causes. What keeps her going? "A firm belief that if I am in a position and given a great privilege to be able to help someone, then I should grab that opportunity and not waste the moment," says the good doctor simply.

In her clinic, she actively looks out for patients who seem anxious about a situation or emotionally drained because of a bad relationship. "Many people in our fast paced society just don't have time or take time to talk through their problems. If I break away from the usual gynae checks and ask a patient why she seems down, we often go on to chat about her stresses and worries. If taking the extra time offers solace and outlet for her because someone cares, or if the discussion gives her perspectives to find her own solution, then that extra time taken is worth so much more to her and to me," affirms Dr Chua.

Previously she noticed a trend for women to focus on their career, settle down later and have kids when they are older. "With better understanding and awareness of problems with older pregnancy, that trend is slowly reversing. I now see more young couples deciding to lead balanced lifestyles and start a family earlier. More young adults give up very toxic stressful jobs for lesser paid ones with better hours and healthier lifestyles. Information about these concepts will help young people make good choices for themselves," says Dr Chua, who also volunteers as a health educator with Singapore Planned Parenthood Association and Ministry of Social and Family Development to give health talks on fertility issues to students in tertiary institution. "I think that these continuous efforts to raise awareness will move our fertility trends in the right direction!"

Witnessing the miracle of birth every day has definitely touched Dr Chua's life, over and over again. "Seeing the heart beating on the ultrasound scan, watching the foetus grow, and seeing the joy and relief on parents' faces when a baby is safely brought into the world... it really doesn't get old. Those are the toppings, the easy reward. Detecting a miscarriage, counselling parents through an adverse event, a loss, a death and helping them heal from it and become brave again to attempt another pregnancy... that courage inspires me. That process helps us all appreciate the miracle of life that much more." A