

2001 SURVEY ON PRIMARY MEDICAL CARE IN SINGAPORE

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the excellent article by Emmanuel et al⁽¹⁾ and the accompanying editorial⁽²⁾. This very important and carefully-conducted study illustrates some of the changes in healthcare and development in Singapore. I am a little concerned, however, that the authors and the editorialist did not highlight what to me was one of the most striking findings in the study: the proportion of patients living in 1- to 3-room HDB flats fell dramatically both in the private sector (36.5% to 25.1%) and more dramatically in the public sector (46.1% to 29.8%). This is reflected in the overall drop from 38.2% to 25.9%. At the same time, the average time spent per patient went up only minimally from 12 minutes (based on 40 patients a day, working 8 hours a day) to 14.5 minutes (based on 33 patients a day).

The rapid economic development in the decade represented by the study is reflected in the raising of the housing status of the respondents. Unfortunately, it looks as if the level of medical care has not risen at as rapid a level despite the increase in the number of doctors in primary care. In Third World countries, doctors see more than 100 patients a day in busy clinics or dispensaries and poor patients tolerate the inevitable errors, lack of system reviews or thorough history and physical examinations and preventive care that cannot be avoided in such a setting. As Singaporeans become more affluent, as reflected in other aspects of our society, it is difficult to see how long we – as a medical profession – can continue to practise at a level that is out of step with the sophistication and aspirations of our patients.

Yours sincerely,

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REFERENCES

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