



Setting Sail in 1974: PFCS Celebrates 50 Years of Service

This year marks a significant milestone for the Public Free Clinic Society (PFCS) as it celebrates its 50th anniversary. What started as a humble clinic in a small HDB shophouse in 1974 has grown into a network of five clinics, reflecting a half-century journey filled with challenges, resilience, and dedication to the community.

Roots in Promoting Traditional Chinese Medicine

PFCS's story begins even earlier, with the establishment of the Association for Promoting Chinese Medicines (APCM) in 1957. By the early '70s, APCM had set its sights on two primary goals: to advocate for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and to provide charitable outpatient services. In line with these ambitions, PFCS was founded in 1974, with its first clinic located at Blk 11 of Upper Boon Keng Road. From day one, the mission was clear — to offer affordable and accessible TCM to those in need.

A Rocky Start, but Fearless in the Face of Adversity

The early days were far from smooth sailing. PFCS Mr President Seow Ser Fatt recalls the immense financial pressure the clinic faced just six months into operations. With rent and medication costs piling up, tough decisions had to be made. At times, members of the Management Committee even reached into their own pockets to keep the clinic afloat.

Thankfully, the clinic's first President, Mr Ng Chee Meng (黄志明), was a tireless advocate. He rallied support and actively sought sponsors, eventually recruiting 50 permanent honorary directors. Their contributions provided much-needed financial relief, giving PFCS the stability to carry on.



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Expanding in Response to Demand

By the late 1970s, PFCS's services were in demand beyond Upper Boon Keng Road. The organization opened new clinics on Crawford Street in 1979 and Bukit Pasoh Road in 1981. Unfortunately, economic downturns forced their closure in the early '90s. Eventually, the original clinic on Upper Boon Keng Road also had to shut its doors in 2013.

But PFCS didn't waver. Staying true to its charitable roots, it pressed forward and established new clinics in Tampines (2001), Clementi (2009), Jurong West (2012), and Bedok (2017). These clinics continue to provide a wide range of TCM treatments, including acupuncture, cupping, and other holistic therapies, keeping PFCS's mission alive—affordable healthcare for all.

Caring for Singapore's Elderly

The Bedok clinic has become a beacon for elderly patients seeking relief from age-related ailments like joint pain, stroke aftercare, and diabetes. PFCS has always placed special emphasis on caring for seniors, even offering transport services to help those with mobility issues get to the clinic. Unfortunately, this transport service is currently on hold due to operational constraints, but PFCS remains hopeful of restoring it soon.

Today, PFCS serves around 15,000 patients a month, totalling about 90,000 visits annually. The majority of patients (70%) are over 51 years old. To meet the needs of the community, PFCS relies on 150 volunteer physicians, alongside 30 resident doctors. Community donations cover 70% of the cost of medicines, with low-income families receiving free or discounted treatments.

Moving Forward with Innovation

In 1999, PFCS received official recognition as a tax-exempt charity from the Ministry of Health, significantly boosting its fundraising capacity. Then, in 2007, the clinic embraced technology by fully computerizing its medical system, allowing doctors to access patient records seamlessly across all locations. By 2019, PFCS had taken another step forward, upgrading its system to enhance patient care and improve treatment efficiency.



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Looking Ahead with Gratitude

After 50 years of service, PFCS remains deeply rooted in its mission to provide compassionate, affordable healthcare to Singapore's heartlanders. As it looks to the future, PFCS is focused on continuing to innovate while staying true to its charitable origins. Despite the many challenges faced along the way, PFCS' story is one of resilience, community support, and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of Singaporeans.

As President Mr Seow Ser Fatt reflects on the past half-century, he expresses deep gratitude to the volunteers, doctors, and supporters who have helped shape PFCS into what it is today. With this strong foundation, the organization is ready to sail confidently into its next 50 years.

Carrying on the Past, Opening the Future: PFCS' Journey of Service and Innovation

As the Public Free Clinic Society (PFCS) marks its 50th anniversary, it stands as a quiet but steadfast beacon of hope, shining brightly in the communities it serves. From its humble beginnings, PFCS has expanded its reach to five clinics across Singapore, continually refining and evolving its services to meet the needs of the people.

Looking ahead, PFCS' focus is clear, with six key areas guiding its mission:

- Training the Next Generation of TCM Professionals
- Providing Home TCM Treatment (HTT)
- Conducting Research Projects
- Establishing a Preventive Care Centre
- Addressing Geriatric Health Issues
- Promoting Health Education

From the very start, PFCS has been committed to grooming future traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) professionals. It all began in 1972 when the Institute of Chinese Medical Studies launched a two-year acupuncture course, followed by the establishment of PFCS in Upper Boon Keng in 1974. Not only did the clinic serve the underprivileged, but it also became a vital training ground for students aspiring to become TCM practitioners.

Today, PFCS continues this legacy by partnering with The Institute of Chinese Medical Studies. Here, advanced diploma students undergo clinical internships at PFCS, benefiting from real-world experience. With the Ministry of Health launching a new clinical programme for newly registered Chinese medicine practitioners in January 2024, PFCS is set to play an even greater role in nurturing future generations of TCM professionals.



Bringing Healing to the Homes: Home TCM Treatment

In 2010, PFCS took its commitment to a new level by launching Singapore's first—and only—Home TCM Treatment (HTT) service. Designed to serve those who are elderly, infirm, or lack family support, the HTT program has already completed over 158,000 visits.

The origins of this service can be traced back to 1983, when PFCS operated a mobile medical service. A medical van would park in HDB estates, offering affordable TCM treatments to residents right at their doorstep. While the mobile clinic was eventually integrated into the HTT team in 2013, the spirit of bringing care directly to the people lives on.

Each HTT team consists of two TCM practitioners, a dispenser, and a driver, ensuring that professional care is delivered to patients across Singapore. The service collaborates with 19 partner organizations, including community centres and elder care facilities, making TCM accessible to those who need it most. Fees remain affordable, with financial assistance available for low-income patients.

Leading the Way in TCM Research

In 2013, the Ministry of Health launched a TCM Research Fund to validate the effectiveness of TCM through scientific studies. PFCS, always forward-thinking, embraced this initiative and officially kicked off its research programme in 2021.

Research Manager Ms Tan Qian Yi emphasized the importance of research for the advancement of TCM: "It helps elevate clinical skills and better tailor treatments to local needs." PFCS has already embarked on three key projects, including studying TCM Body Constitution types in Singapore residents, studying TCM Body Constitution types of post-COVID patients and treatment of Qi-Yin Deficiency and Blood Stasis in Xiao Ke patients. There are more studies on the horizon, including research on insomnia, hypertension, eczema.



Prevention is Better than Cure: The Preventive Care Centre

In January 2021, PFCS took another bold step by opening its Preventive Care Centre at Geylang HQ. The idea, long in the making since 2015, is rooted in TCM's philosophy of preventing illness before it strikes.

By focusing on improving lifestyle habits, diet, and exercise, the centre aims to boost immunity and stave off future health issues.

Vice President Ms Kwek Mei Lin believes preventive care is the future: "While treating illness is reactive, prevention is proactive. It's challenging but essential." PFCS plans to expand its preventive care services by working with Grassroots Organizations, starting with Bedok, in hopes of fostering a healthier community through education and early intervention.

Caring for Singapore's Aging Population

As Singapore's population ages, PFCS has stepped up to meet the growing demand for geriatric care. In fact, 70% of PFCS' patients are over 50 years old. Rising healthcare costs and the burden of chronic illness are major concerns, particularly for the elderly.

In response, PFCS established a dedicated geriatric TCM treatment centre at its Bedok clinic in 2017. Specializing in age-related conditions like rheumatism, post-stroke symptoms, and diabetes, this centre provides high-quality, affordable care to elderly patients. PFCS remains focused on expanding its services to ensure the elderly receive the attention and care they deserve.

Promoting Health Education for the Community

Health education has long been a cornerstone of PFCS' mission. Over the years, it has organized public lectures on pressing topics such as SARS awareness, stress management, and mental health. By equipping the public with knowledge, PFCS empowers individuals to take charge of their health and well-being.



Celebrating 50 Years of Compassionate Care

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, PFCS will host a charity gala dinner with a fundraising goal of S\$1 million. The funds raised will ensure that PFCS can continue its invaluable work, making TCM care accessible to all, regardless of income.

President Mr Seow Ser Fatt invites the community to rally behind PFCS in this milestone year: “We hope everyone will join us in this meaningful journey to sustain our charitable work and continue serving Singaporeans for many years to come.”

From training TCM professionals to bringing healthcare to the doorstep, PFCS’s story over the past 50 years is one of resilience, compassion, and dedication to the people. As it looks to the future, PFCS remains committed to its founding mission—caring for the community with heart and healing hands.

The Unsung Heroes: Volunteer Physicians at PFCS

At the heart of the PFCS are its volunteer physicians—nearly 150 dedicated individuals who, alongside resident doctors, form the backbone of the clinic's medical services. These volunteers aren't just filling gaps; they are a vital part of the PFCS community, helping to ensure that patients receive the care they need, when they need it.

PFCS serves as a clinical training base for students from the Institute of Chinese Medical Studies, and many newly graduated practitioners choose to return as volunteer physicians after completing their internships. It's a powerful testament to the deep sense of purpose PFCS instills in them.

A Model That Works

PFCS operates six days a week, with consultation hours divided into morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. Resident physicians, of which there are 30 on staff, typically handle the morning and afternoon shifts. However, it's the volunteer physicians who step in for the evening sessions, often staying late to ensure no patient is left behind. This arrangement not only helps PFCS meet the high demand for TCM services, but also gives volunteers invaluable hands-on experience.

It's a model that reflects PFCS' charitable spirit, ensuring affordable healthcare for the community, while giving young practitioners the opportunity to learn and grow.



A Diverse Team with a Shared Purpose

The volunteer physicians at PFCS come from diverse backgrounds, ranging from bachelor's degree holders to those with master's and even doctoral qualifications in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The team spans different age groups and professional experiences, united by a common goal: to serve the community.

Since 2012, graduates from Nanyang Technological University's dual-degree TCM program have also joined the volunteer ranks, bringing fresh perspectives and new energy. While these physicians offer their time and expertise freely, they are required to meet strict professional standards. Every volunteer physician must be a registered TCM practitioner with a valid license and, most importantly, good character. To maintain quality and professionalism, they reapply and sign contracts annually, ensuring their compliance with clinical regulations and enabling them to receive the necessary benefits.

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Looking ahead, PFCS is committed to investing more resources into TCM continuing education programs for its volunteer physicians. By enhancing their skills and knowledge, these volunteers will be even better equipped to provide accurate diagnoses and effective treatments, ensuring that the quality of care remains high for the thousands of patients PFCS serves each month.

In the hustle and bustle of clinic life, the volunteer physicians at PFCS are the unsung heroes, working quietly but tirelessly to uphold the clinic's mission of affordable, compassionate care. Their dedication is a cornerstone of PFCS, proving that when we come together in service to others, we can make a world of difference.