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AGEING WELL, MY WAY

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Roundtable discussion on "The Future of Ageing for Singapore - Debunk, Discover, Innovate" addresses the challenges and opportunities of longevity



The "100 year life", representing longer lifespans of populations across the globe, is spotlighting the increasing need for businesses, governments to prepare for the needs and wellbeing of this greying demographic. Within this context, industry frontrunners and experts gathered on 15 May 2019 at a private roundtable to discuss and identify the top five challenges in pushing the ageing agenda forward.

Themed "The Future of Ageing for Singapore - Debunk, Discover, Innovate", the session was jointly organised by the Shirin Fozdar Programme (SFP) and the Ageing Asia Alliance. 20 speakers including moderators Ms Janice Chia, Founder & Managing Director, Ageing Asia Pte Ltd, and Mr Liak Teng Lit, Co-Chair, Kampung Admiralty Project, shared their insights drawn from their experiences as elderly care operators, social sector experts, researchers and entrepreneurs. Ms Chia aptly introduced herself as someone "with a dream to make Singapore the model for ageing". Speakers at the roundtable included:

- Ms Chan Ee Lin, SFP Board Member
- Ms Priyanka Shahra, SFP Board Member
- Dr Kanwaljit Soin, Author, Orthopedic Surgeon and Former Nominated Member of Parliament
- Mr Laurence Lien, Co-Founder & CEO, Asia Philanthropy Circle (APC) and Chairman, Lien Foundation
- Mr Bernie Poh, Executive Director, Allium Healthcare Holdings Pte Ltd, SVP, GK Goh Strategic Holdings Pte Ltd
- Dr Ow Chee Chung, CEO, Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital
- Dr Christopher Lien, Senior Consultant, Geriatric Medicine, Changi General Hospital
- Ms Chan Su Yee, CEO, NTUC Health Co-operative Limited
- Mdm Low Mui Lang, Executive Director, The Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home
- Ms Jiaming Ju, Associate Director, Centre for Research on the Economics of Ageing, SMU
- Mr Ho Han Peng, Acting Head, Lien Centre for Social Innovation, SMU

In her welcome remarks, Ms Claire Chiang, SFP Chairperson and Co-founder of Banyan Tree Holdings, thanked Ageing Asia for the collaborative effort in organising the roundtable. For over a decade, the SFP has provided a platform to bring students, advocates, policy-makers, businesses, institutions and the public together to shape a resilient community and nurture integrated perspectives in women's development.














Beyond advocating for the empowerment of women, SFP also champions issues for holistic growth for the community. 2019 marks SFP's 10-year anniversary at Singapore Management University (SMU) and Ms Chiang shared that a publication celebrating SFP'S key milestones and achievements would be launched at SMU by end of the year.



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In line with the SFP's ethos on building resilient communities, the roundtable served as a continuation of the trajectory to leverage upon the collective expertise of industry practitioners to further the ageing agenda. This journey first started in 2017, when SFP and the Centre for Research on the Economics of Ageing (CREA) at SMU jointly co-hosted a roundtable themed "Ageing in Singapore: The Next Step." The session had gathered key leaders and industry experts from both the public and private sector to discuss different types of local and overseas community care models, and examined how technology and digitalisation can adapt to better caregiving services for the elderly.

The objective of the discussion was to identify the top five challenges in pushing the ageing agenda forward, covering areas such as infrastructure, workforce, funding, policies, and services. Ms Chiang highlighted that findings of the discussion, including ideas and solutions, would be shared in the next issue of the Ageing Asia Alliance Journal.

Ms Chia and Mr Liak started the roundtable by inviting Mrs Pauline Ong, 74-year old Singapore-based retiree, to share on her personal life experience as a member of the silver community and to set the stage for the discussion. Brimming with health and with a twinkle in her eye, Mrs Ong titled her sharing "Ageing Well, My Way" in an ode to Sinatra. She declared, "The surest thing of life is death. It's a journey. Where and how we lived will impact how we die."

Mrs Ong chronicled her retirement from the corporate sector and the post-retirement activities she engaged in, her experience as a primary caregiver to a husband after he was diagnosed with dementia and her journey with end of life care with him. Today, three years after his passing, she continues to lead an active lifestyle that includes singing, swimming, volunteering to manage activities at church and giving tours as a docent.

Equipped with a degree in pharmacy, Mrs Ong discovered her passion for museums when she relocated to London with her husband in her early twenties. According to Mrs Ong, it is ideal to develop interests outside of work, as early as possible in life, instead of waiting to the point of retirement to do so. Besides cultivating hobbies outside of one's profession, she found that religious faith, mentors and role models helped one to weather inevitable challenges faced in the process of growing old. Being able to turn to a circle of trusted friends helped her get through the rollercoaster of emotions after the passing of her husband.

"We have to be comfortable with ourselves. I'm happy with my silver hair. I'm happy to be putting on weight," said Mrs Ong, to laughter from her listeners. Besides keeping active and building a wide network, she suggested for her peers to make friends with younger people and stay current with the times, such as picking up the skills to use mobile devices, apps and video editing.



Having heard Mrs Ong's interpretation of what ageing well entails, speakers at the roundtable delved into various dimensions of the issues within the ecosystem of ageing, well-being and elderly support, such as workforce needs, infrastructure, funding, policies and services. Based on data gathered by CREA, allowing for better insights to Singapore's ageing situation, Ms Ju cited retirement adequacy as a reason for elderly in Singapore wanting to continue to work beyond the retirement age. On this point, Ms Chia questioned how society could create more purposeful employment opportunities for the elderly, including flexible work arrangements.

The consensus among speakers was that while growing old is not necessarily a bad thing, what truly matters is the quality of life, and how society perceives longevity. Ms Tsao touched on "retirement at age 65" being rooted in a historical concept of a three-phased life, where an individual would study, work and retire in a linear fashion. This remains an artificial construct that we are stuck with even as demographics today shift towards learning, re-learning, career breaks, sabbaticals and retraining, or in other words, a multi-stage life. Dr Soin highlighted the fact that elderly people, being almost always looked upon as a burden, surely had a role to play in the workforce, and that Singapore could take this opportunity to be at the forefront of creating the thinking of a multi-stage life.

Concurring with her point, several speakers agreed that the way in which work is structured in Singapore, including retirement savings via central provident funds, could well be stuck with an obsolete model that requires an update in thinking. Mr Lien highlighted the fact that too many older people are retiring too early. In future, equipped with longer lifespans, people will need to save for the multiple transitions they are making in their careers, as they seek to retool and recreate themselves to achieve aspirational needs.

The discussions sparked a deeper understanding of ideas and solutions such as elderly home care services, the resourcing of formal caregivers, reward structures for informal caregivers, delving into society's perception of older people and the value they bring. Concluding with a roundup of the points raised towards creating a model society for ageing, Ms Chiang said that these suggestions could be put across to government agencies and businesses, for them to come together to make this work.

SMU hopes that such initiatives enhance the understanding of societal challenges and make meaningful impact, through multi-disciplinary research that addresses Asian issues of global relevance, as well as outreach and collaboration with industry.

The roundtable discussion was one in a series of ageing-related activities within [The Ageing Innovation Exhibition](#). Organised by Ageing Asia, the exhibition was held at the Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre from 14 to 15 May 2019, serving as a springboard for product launches of innovations handpicked by the team at Ageing Asia that could be best adapted and translated to meet the needs of the ageing industry. As Asia's first curated exhibition of the world's top 50 trending products and brands envisioned to change the future of ageing, this was a platform where the newest eldercare products and solutions from around the globe could be presented.

[Featured Photo: The Shirin Fozdar Programme participants at the private roundtable themed "The Future of Ageing for Singapore - Debunk, Discover, Innovate," held at Marina Bay Sands on 15 May 2019.]

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