

## A Chapter From My Diary: The 12<sup>th</sup> National Geriatric Conference 2016

Contributed by:

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Most of us are familiar with the experience of attending professional conferences. As speech language therapists, we look out for conferences relevant to our clinical practice as we aim to keep abreast with the latest in the field of speech language pathology. In recent years, I have discovered that some of the most enjoyable conference experiences can be gained through participating in cross-disciplinary scientific conferences. In this article, I would like to share the inspiration and optimism which I felt from attending a medical conference.

It all began in July 2016 when the abstract I had submitted was accepted for oral presentation at the 12<sup>th</sup> National Geriatric Conference 2016. Jointly organized by the Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine, Geriatrics Unit of Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Sabah this conference was held at the Le Meridien Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, from 4-6 August 2016.



The beautiful "Land Below The Wind"

I travelled to Kota Kinabalu with the hope that I would not cross paths with unexpected surprises as I returned to Kuala Lumpur fulfilled with new knowledge. A few hours into the first day of conference, I met with an unexpected surprise in the form of long lost friends from my school days. I certainly did not expect a medical conference could be a platform for a heart-warming reunion! Also, I was pleasantly surprised by the excellent dance performances presented by the Sabah Tourism Board.



Traditional cultural dance

The Conference consisted of a total of 6 plenaries, 14 symposia, 14 oral presentations and 14 poster presentations across the 3-day event. The speakers in this conference came from varied geographical origins (Malaysia, Singapore, USA, UK) and specializations (medicine, nursing, allied healthcare, scientific research and many more). I was impressed by a particular topic entitled, "Advance Care Planning", by Dr. Noorhazlina, a consultant geriatrician from Singapore. The content of her presentation was informative and

inspirational. I found myself nodding in agreement and appreciation throughout her presentation.

The concept of Advance Care Planning is encapsulated in this definition by Living Matters Advanced Care Planning (ACP) 2016:

**Advance Care Planning (ACP)** is the process of **planning** for your future health and personal **care**.  
Having ACP conversations with your loved ones allows you to: Share your personal values and beliefs.  
Explore how your values and beliefs affect your healthcare preferences in difficult medical situations.

From the perspective of dysphagia management, my deep appreciation for ACP is born out of my reflection on the professional ethical dilemma concerning the decision to tube feed older people inflicted with progressive/degenerative medical conditions that cause them to lose cognitive ability to make decisions for him/herself, being semi-conscious or unconscious, unable to talk or communicate and/or unable to swallow safely. I foresee ACP being tremendously helpful in supporting our efforts in caring for our patients while preserving their dignity.

Inspired by amazing speakers, I delivered my presentation which outlined the importance of good oral hygiene amongst the elderly in preventing respiratory complications. Interestingly, I met with a fascinating question which came up at least 3 times during the conference – “Grace, what did you study to become a speech language therapist?” It was great to see interest in speech language pathology coming from colleagues in healthcare and the general public. Presenting at cross-disciplinary scientific conferences provides an engaging channel for promoting the speech language pathology profession in Malaysia. It is an enjoyable experience that I highly recommend and strongly encourage.

Beyond the walls of the conference halls, Kota Kinabalu reminded me of the greatness of God through His creation.



Seaview from Le Meridien



Sunset at Tanjung Aru

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Khor Hui Min and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tan Maw Pin for their kindness and encouragement. This successful journey to Kota Kinabalu was supported by their doses of optimism and motivation.