

# UpClose

with **Dr Veronica Toh**

Specialist in Paediatric Medicine, Raffles Children's Centre

**D**r Veronica Toh, 45, joined Raffles Hospital more than seven years ago. The active mum of three boys (Daniel, 14, Matthew, 13, and David, 10) has finished a few triathlons with support from her husband, Jeffrey, an Orthopaedic Surgeon. Her goal: a half marathon before she hits the big 50.

UpClose speaks to Dr Toh about her life as she shares with us the fulfilling moments in her work with children.

### What made you decide to focus on Paediatric Medicine?

I didn't have any unequivocal ambition at 'A' levels except that if it's highly coveted, it must be good. That's how I ended up in medicine and later in paediatrics. A major crossroad was in housemanship when I encountered the abandoned elderly, terminally ill patients and sudden unexpected deaths. The sadness pervading the wards was indescribable and the same sorrow drove me to the other extreme of juvenility complete with diapers and utter dependency, in the midst of a joyful population of patients.

### So, how did you start your medical training?

My training years were spent in KK Women's and Children's Hospital and I literally grew up there! Those years were immensely fulfilling. After holding the consultant post as a Neonatologist in KK for a few years, I decided that I didn't want to miss the opportunity of breaking out of my comfort career zone.

### What is the biggest challenge as a Neonatologist?

Ensuring premature babies survive 'intact'. Treating and managing premature babies is exceedingly challenging and can be wrought with many unprecedented and sometimes unavoidable complications, like brain haemorrhages, deafness, blindness and cerebral palsy. It is extremely satisfying to see the child grow up without any deficits. My first 26 week premature baby in Raffles Hospital, Sean, is now six years old, going to Primary one next year and completely 'intact' with no neurological deficit whatsoever.

### To be a Specialist in Paediatric Medicine, are there any specific skills or interests that you need to have?

Passion. It is the only virtue that can endure fretful children, wailing babies and long nights watching the ventilated premature baby fight for his life. Of course, one needs to be able to talk and play with children and yet have the confidence to reassure the parents.

### What do you enjoy most about your work?

It is a joy meeting children every day as they say the most earnest things! It's so endearing when they sneak up to you with a little card they made or a posy of appreciation. They really make my day.

### What's a typical day for you like?

I'll wake the kids at 6am and send them to school. Next, a cuppa with my husband while scrutinising the papers (love politics) and then I'm off to work. A quick ward round followed by outpatient clinic the rest of the day. In between, the day may be punctuated with standby delivery, paediatric reviews or admissions. I usually wrap up at 6pm so I can be home by 7pm. I oversee the preparation of dinner and if I have the time, I cook or go for a run. Then it's studying with the kids. After the kids have been tucked in, I read or do anything else necessary and it's bedtime by 12 midnight. If I'm on call, I will usually be called back, sometimes for the entire night.

### Any fulfilling moments in your work to share with us?

Every moment in life is fulfilling - watching a baby being born and facing the beginning of a new life, children recovering from their illness, a speech-delayed child learning to talk, a handful of autistic children being friendly and chatting with me after therapy, a hypotonic child who finally walk at 18 months.

### In your work, you often have to work with the children, any secrets on how you handle them?

No secrets. I like talking and playing with children, so I suppose it's just part of my disposition.

### Any tips you would like to share with us, how do you take care of your kids to keep them away from sickness?

We eat a huge variety of fruits after dinner every day (and a host of other unhealthy food at snack time). Keep them happy and stress-free. I rarely give any medication to them and I avoid antibiotics as far as possible. **HN**



Dr Veronica Toh with her husband, Jeffrey and their three sons at a family holiday in Queenstown, New Zealand.

