

Caring for the digestive system

Gastroenterologist Lim Lee Guan tells **Joan Chew** why he is like a bee in a colony

I specialise in gastroenterology because...

When I was a medical student and junior doctor, I was fortunate to be mentored in research projects by professors who are also gastroenterologists.

They piqued my interest in this sub-speciality of internal medicine, which involves bedside clinical work and performing procedures, such as an endoscopy, which allows doctors to look inside the gastrointestinal tract.

The digestive system in a human is fascinating because...

It is not only involved in the transmission of food from the mouth to the anus. It also has many other important roles, such as enzyme secretion from the pancreas, the production of important proteins, processing of toxins in the liver and the absorption of nutrients in the gut.

One little known fact about the stomach is...

A bacteria called helicobacter pylori in the stomachs of some people can cause gastritis, stomach and duodenal ulcers and even stomach cancer.

Fortunately, there are accurate tests to diagnose and ways to treat a helicobacter pylori infection.

If I were to give an analogy for what I do, I would be...

A bee in a colony.

I am a doctor in a large health-care system, consisting of patients and health-care workers, such as nurses, pharmacists, dietitians, therapists, cleaners, administrators and fellow doctors.

The synergy we enjoy in the system is important as it helps us provide optimum care for our patients, who are our "queen bees". We work together to produce "honey" for them – which would be equivalent to positive outcomes for our patients.

A typical day for me...

Starts with taking my eight-year-old son to school, before I reach the hospital some time after 7am.

I review my patients in the ward, perform endoscopies and see patients in my clinic. This keeps me occupied till the afternoon.



ST PHOTO: RUDY WONG

I end my day by reviewing my patients in the ward again, before leaving the hospital, usually after 6pm.

Outside of work, I spend time with family and friends. My elder son enjoyed the Human Body Experience Exhibition and the show Titans Of The Ice Age during a recent outing to the Singapore Science Centre.

I have come across all types of cases...

From gastroesophageal reflux disease, dyspepsia or gastric pain, helicobacter pylori infections, irritable bowel syndrome, bleeding from the gastrointestinal tract and cirrhosis, to cancers of the gullet, stomach, gut, liver and pancreas.

I have been monitoring a woman with a genetic condition that causes multiple polyps in her stomach and small and large intestines.

Some of the polyps can grow very big and cause complications. I have been performing endoscopy tests to resect her polyps at regular intervals.

The largest polyp I have removed is about 3cm in diameter with a polyp stalk (a long strand of tissue attached to it). Despite her condition, she has a positive outlook and a supportive husband.

I love patients who are...

Motivated to achieve good health, such as those who will cut down on their intake of alcohol or eventually abstaining from it; and those who try to lose weight through a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Things that put a smile on my face are...

Seeing patients with any condition, simple or complex, get well. Wouldn't you feel happy too?

It breaks my heart when...

Patients seek medical care too late – that is, when the disease can no longer be effectively managed.

I wouldn't trade places for the world because...

I enjoy what I am doing, which encompasses interacting and listening to patients, diagnosing and managing their conditions.

My best tip...

Screening is important. Anybody who is 50 and above should go for colorectal cancer screening, which can be done using stool tests (available from polyclinics and general practitioner clinics) or a colonoscopy procedure.

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**BIO
BOX**

Dr Lim Lee Guan

AGE: 40

OCCUPATION: Specialist in gastroenterology and consultant at Raffles Internal Medicine Centre at Raffles Hospital

Dr Lim learnt the basics of medicine when he joined the Red Cross in secondary school and the First Aid Club in junior college.

He even kept himself up-to-date with the developments in medicine by reading up on them in his spare time.

But he was apprehensive about applying to study medicine at the National University of Singapore as there were only 150 spots, he recalled. Instead, he secured a place in its engineering course.

But he had a change of mind midway through his national service and successfully gained entry into medical school.

In 2010, he underwent specialised training in advanced endoscopic imaging – including endoscopic ultrasound and endoscopic ultrasound-guided fine needle aspiration – in Germany, under the Health Ministry's Health Manpower Development Programme.

He uses these methods to diagnose and manage conditions, such as cancer, or diseases of the pancreas, unexplained lymph node enlargement and submucosal tumours of the digestive tract.

He is on the editorial board of the journal, British Medical Journal Open Gastroenterology.

Dr Lim is married to a housewife. They have two sons aged eight and two.

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