

## EPILOGUE

**IN LATE 2019**, we made the decision to tweak the structure of our SGH Disease Outbreak Taskforce to allow the domain experts to take the lead. It turned out to be a fortuitous move. Tan Thuan Tong as the Head of the Department of Infectious Diseases and Loo Chian Min as the Chairman of the Division of Medicine have very ably led our COVID-19 response.

With their domain expertise, they were able to sieve out relevant information and make sense of the volatile and complex situation. Senior management provided the support and resources for the Taskforce. Frequent and coherent communication through multiple channels was crucial in bringing everyone onto the same page for a coordinated and concerted effort. We were in this together!

With the mindset that no one had a monopoly on knowledge, a collective leadership structure with a flattened hierarchy was critical. Many people stepped up. They did not wait for instructions from the top but readily came up with ideas and carried out the solutions. The SGH can-do spirit shone through. The pandemic re-emphasized the core values of SGH.

Collaborations and teaming across various domains occurred naturally. SARS veterans and epidemic neophytes brought complementary insights and worked seamlessly together. I was initially stunned by how fast our people responded – repurposing space for fever screening, converting wards for isolation purposes, the list goes on. Each of those achievements, taken on their own, was amazing. The fact that they all happened in quick succession, with nary a decree from management, was simply phenomenal.

The pandemic showcased how resilient and innovative our people are. While we had invested in epidemic preparedness, and had in fact exercised several scenarios, the staff still had to come up with creative solutions in a very short time. We all adapted quickly to new ways of working. SGH is not the super-tanker that takes time to change its course. We proved ourselves surprisingly agile.

We have faced three waves of infections in the past two years, driven by different variants of the virus. Each time, we adjusted our approach without letting up on our efforts or vigilance. As this book goes to print, we are in the midst of the biggest community spread of COVID-19 infections thus far. More than 20,000 cases were reported on several days at the end of February 2022. In tandem with the high amount of cases, the number of patients in hospital has also surged.

As the nation's flagship and largest hospital, SGH attends to everyone who turns up on our doorstep. Once again, we see amazing effort, making sure that no one is denied the care they need. Our people are fiercely protective of our unspoken compact with the nation – that SGH will always be here, to journey with Singapore through thick and thin.

We have learnt so much from this pandemic, but one lesson, to me, stands out – that it is paramount to take care of our people. We have always held fast to the mantra “Patients at the heart of all we do”. It is clear that our people must be at the heart of how we do that. Our people are our greatest asset. Take care of them and they will do amazing things – for the hospital, for our patients.

We can be proud of what we have done, and I am excited at what we will continue to achieve together.

**DR RUBAN POOPALALINGAM**  
Chairman of Medical Board