



IS FOR FAMILY PRACTICE

DR CHARYU NARAYAN, who trained in paediatrics and neonatology in the UK, is now part of the international team of GPs at CHI Health.

As a family doctor, how different is your workload in Singapore, compared with the UK?

Interestingly, it has changed from mainly chronic disease management in the UK to seeing more acute illness here, both in adults and children. Viral illnesses – coughs, colds and gastroenteritis – constitute the majority of issues at our clinic. Other common illnesses are hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) in younger children, and skin infections.

Children, including newborns, are seen for developmental checks, concerns from parents and for routine as well as travel vaccinations. A high fever in kids raises concern about dengue and chikungunya – both mosquito-borne illnesses found in Singapore. With in-house testing available at CHI, we are able to speed up diagnosis and management.

Influenza circulates all year round and as families travel frequently, it can be imported from their place of travel, as can typhoid and malaria.

On another note, I also frequently come across psychological issues and anxiety depression in children and adolescents. The stress of moving away from the home country, adjustment to new schools and a new culture may be responsible for these conditions becoming manifest. I must mention seeing a spectrum of eating disorders in teenage girls, too.



Which other childhood ailments that you see are associated with living in the tropics?

Mycoplasma infection deserves a mention and presents with a cough, mild fever and fatigue lasting longer than a usual cold. Some people are able to fight off the infection without medication but I see children in whom the infection causes missed school days and low levels of energy. This group may need a course of antibiotics and follow up if they have a lung infection.

Parasitic infections and bacterial gastroenteritis cases linked to food hygiene and sanitation are often seen following holiday travel in the Subcontinent.

The absence of a winter in Singapore is a plus for asthmatic children whose symptoms are worse in cold weather, but I've observed that haze pollution triggers breathing problems in children. Dust mites – a common allergen here – are also a trigger.

What attracted you to paediatrics and neonatology in the first place?

It's a unique branch of medicine that requires interaction with the child *and* the family. Even though it's heartbreaking to see children suffer, it's also great to see them bounce back after illness – and amazing to see them grow and develop over the years.

As physical and psychological health are so closely interwoven, a good rapport with one's paediatric patients can make all the difference in making them better. As a GP seeing children in a private practice like CHI, I have more continuity and contact with them than I would have as a hospital doctor, and I find that personally satisfying.

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