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Editorial board members of Malaysian Family Physician

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On a gloomy Thursday morning, 23 December 2021, Professor Dr Liew Su May passed away at home after a long fight with SLE and cancer, surrounded by her loved ones. She leaves behind her beloved husband, Dr Saini Jeffery Freddy Abdullah, and their daughter, Elena May Saini Jeffery.

The second of three siblings, Professor Liew was born on 7 September, 1970 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Mr Liew Yoon Loy and Mdm Teoh Ah Nya. She was educated in Convent Bukit Nanas, Kuala Lumpur, pursued her secondary education at Raffles Girls’ Secondary school, and attended National Junior College for her Pre-U (A-levels) as an ASEAN scholar in Singapore before returning to Universiti Malaya to study Medicine. It was here she met Saini. She graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in 1994 and obtained her Masters of Medicine (Family Medicine) in 2003. She joined her alma mater at the Department of Primary Care Medicine as a lecturer in 2004, beginning her academic life. Professor Liew developed a keen interest in research after entering academia, which prompted her to pursue her PhD at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom under the supervision of Professor Dr Paul Glasziou. She was an excellent scholar and a passionate advocate of evidence-based medicine (EBM) and was subsequently appointed as a Fellow at the Center for Evidence Based Medicine, Oxford University (2012–2016). She transferred her knowledge, skill and expertise in EBM back to Universiti Malaya and was the inaugural undergraduate EBM coordinator at the Faculty of Medicine since 2013.

Professor Liew was an insightful primary care physician and researcher with many landmark achievements to her credit. Her research interests spanned from cardiovascular disease in particular cardiovascular risk score and modelling to exploring effective ways to teach and implement EBM and, in the later stage of her academic career, respiratory diseases. She continuously searched for and addressed research gaps and topics neglected in our region, with the aim of conducting more translational research to improve patient care. She was a key researcher from Malaysia at the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Respiratory Health (RESPIRE), University of Edinburgh. This led her to become a RESPIRE Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, exploring the development and implementation of Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in Malaysia and the region at a time when PPI was still in its infancy. In Malaysia, patients and the public are not usually asked about their views regarding research, yet Professor Liew was passionate about empowering patients and the public to play an active role in research. She championed this cause by writing a section on PPI in an online research module (Manuscript Writing Made Easy), delivering a plenary talk on PPI at the UM Faculty of Medicine Research Carnival in 2021, and another plenary talk at the 7th Sabah Medical Research and Scientific Conference on Developing Patient and Public Involvement in Research in Malaysia (September 2019).

Professor Liew contributed significantly to the academic world as editor and writer, both locally and internationally. She was a member of the Editorial Board of Malaysian Family Physician since 2012. In 2016, she became the chief editor, presiding over 213 articles and ensuring they were of the highest standard. In addition, she was an Honorary Clinical Epidemiologist for the National Clinical Research Centre of Malaysia. Internationally, she contributed significantly to the International Primary Care Respiratory Group (IPCRG). She was an inspirational member of the Leadership School and Teach the Teacher programme on children with asthma of IPCRG, which continues to spread throughout Malaysia. Her
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IPCRG legacy includes developing an innovative iQ&A programme, devising the research strategy, and contributing to writing the palliative care section of the massive open online course.

Professor Liew was also heavily involved in postgraduate training in family medicine. She was appointed as the Postgraduate Coordinator at the Department of Primary Care Medicine, UM in 2018 and led the development of the Malaysia National Postgraduate Medical Curriculum for Family Medicine since 2014. Despite the multiple medical conditions she lived with, her academic achievements were remarkable: she supervised and graduated 20 postgraduate Master of Family Medicine trainees and 7 postgraduate research students. Due to her personal illness experience, she embraced the importance of patient-centred care and of engaging patients in decision making. She supported research and taught EBM skills to medical students and postgraduate trainees across Malaysia, including colleagues from Hospis Malaysia and the Ministry of Health Clinical Research Centres.

Professor Liew exuded passion and enthusiasm in everything she did, from clinical practice and teaching to research. As a mentor, although uncompromising on scientific rigor and excellence, she was always kind, patient, encouraging and supportive. Her infectious laugh and enormous sense of humour, as well as her fight for justice and integrity, have left and will continue to leave an indelible mark on everyone who knew her. Beyond the professional front, she was a wonderful friend who genuinely cared for and never failed to show affection to those around her; indeed, academic conversations would often end with discussions about gardening, food, recipes or books she had read. Professor Liew’s legacy – “let’s address the elephant in the room” or “the most important thing is your research question” – alongside her strong sense of reasoning and relentless fight for the truth will influence us for many years to come.