



INNOVATE
The Road from Innovation to Impact

FACEOFF

SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS (OR NOT?)

Would a crisis be necessary to produce the most impactful innovations in healthcare? We unveil the details of what went down at the recent FACEOFF, a debate that ignited curiosity and shifted mindsets!

WRITTEN BY TJUT ROSTINA, CHI

One of CHI INNOVATE's much beloved events returned this year, after a hiatus since its phenomenal showcase in 2019 (no thanks to the pandemic). Taking on a hybrid format with live audience and broadcasted online, the event engaged close to 300 people from healthcare and related industries.

With much innovative technologies, processes and advances made in the last 2 years to battle the pandemic, the notion that "crisis drives innovation" was a hot conversational topic. Indeed, progress in pandemic related innovations have sped up as a result of reprioritisation of such initiatives, but would a crisis be necessary to produce the most impactful innovations in healthcare? This sets the premise for this year's edition of FACEOFF!



Top of their game in their fields of expertise, the debaters were singled out to argue their stand on the motion, "It takes a crisis to produce the most impactful and sustainable healthcare innovations".

The respective teams' objective was to sway the audience's pre-conceived opinion on the motion.

THE PROPOSITION TEAM, WHO CALLED THEMSELVES

"TEAM 606" FEATURED:

- Mr Jason Lai, Principal Conductor, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore
- Ms Cherry Khoo, Co-Founder & Director, Advanced Ophthalmic Innovations Pte Ltd and Aereus Scientific Pte Ltd
- Prof Paul Tambyah, Senior Consultant, Infectious Diseases, National University Hospital

VS

GOING UP AGAINST THEM AS THE OPPOSITION TEAM,

"THE PEACEMAKERS", WERE:

- Ms Ai Ling Sim-Devadas, Co-Chair, SingHealth Patient Advocacy Network (SPAN)
- Dr Jared Poon, Principal Consultant, Counter Fictional
- Dr Habeebul Rahman, Senior Consultant, Psychiatry, Tan Tock Seng Hospital

To referee the exciting and fiery debate was FACEOFF's returning Chairwoman, Dr Sue Anne Toh, CEO, Co-Founder and Medical Director at NOVI Health. Dr Toh laid down the laws of the debate and shared:

“The definition of ‘crisis’ as an event or set of circumstances which challenges our sense of safety, values or appropriateness; and causes damage to organisation and individuals, which cannot on its own, be put to an immediate end.”

The audience was then asked to vote the side of the debate they are on, and most indicated that they agreed with the proposition, in that “It takes a crisis to produce the most impactful and sustainable healthcare innovations”.

With both sides ready to defend their positions and armed with arguments to sway mindsets, the battleground was set.

OF THE GREATEST SYMPHONIES AND SPARKLERS!

The first speaker to take the stage was Jason Lai of the Proposition Team. Starting off calm as he brought the audience on a symphonic trail of Ludwig van Beethoven's life. As he lulled everyone's minds to the memorable classic symphonies by Beethoven, he made an impassioned plea for everyone to see how the composer, who despite his gradual loss of hearing and dealing with his own trauma, was able to dig deep into his soul and against his struggles to innovate and create music. In fact, the composer was almost completely deaf by the time he composed the classic “Ode to Joy”, a piece that has been well loved for over centuries.

On that note, Mr Lai then directed the audience to his own personal experience as a conductor and counsellor, where listening carefully to the surrounding and helping others tap on their own strengths would bring out creativity and innovation to achieve what was needed. He concluded his argument with how **having overcome a personal crisis or challenge, opened up creativity that would sustain through time**, a reference back to Beethoven's famous pieces like “Symphony Number 5”.



Mr Jason Lai, Principal Conductor, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore



Ms Ai Ling Sim-Devadas, Co-Chair, SingHealth Patient Advocacy Network (SPAN)

All set to counter the rationale put forth by Mr Lai, the opposition team's Ai Ling Sim-Devadas straight up stated that the references and arguments made by Mr Lai is an outlier. Clad in a t-shirt that screamed “Committed to Transforming the Human Experience in Healthcare”, Ms Sim looked every bit the part of a revolutionary activist as she pushed ahead stating, “Innovations in a crisis may be impactful at the time but will it be sustainable once the crisis is over? There are many conditions that need to be present, leadership buy-in, organisational support...the human connection is key!”

During a crisis, the need for speed would mean that the innovation would take the path of least resistance, a quick fix in order to solve a problem. But **it takes deep understanding of what the patient need; what the system needs; what structures and processes are needed to be in place to design a meaningful innovation, and this was best done in peace time.**

Strengthening her argument, Ms Sim-Devadas positioned herself as a patient and caregiver, who benefitted from the “Electronic Medical Records” system, where medical records were accessible seamlessly between healthcare institutions, enabling better care and patient experience, without the stress of moving records physically or missing out on documentation as was the case 20 years ago

This innovation was only possible in peace time because it involved structural and process changes. Lighting up a sparkler, Ms Sim-Devadas likened innovations that arise in a crisis, to a spark that shines bright for a period, but would not last.



OF WARS AND METAPHORS

To look into the future and to make sense of the present, Ms Cherry Khoo took a trip into past global wars, where stakes were high in intelligence, technological and medical advancements.

Innovations such as radio telegraphy and fibre optics have led to the invention of innovations of today's scopes, and communication lines that opened up access to a wealth of information online.

She cited **large, long lasting innovations such as in technology, telecommunications including healthcare came out because of a crisis.** She further cited that the rollout of the mRNA vaccines was possible due to COVID, when previously only used in studies that searched for a cancer cure.

Stepping up to the plate to bat next from the Opposition Team, was Dr Jared Poon. Lightening the mood in the room, he urged everyone to think beyond the immediate examples of innovations. "Is innovation a lizard?", he asked, as the audience wondered how the common house pest would have anything to do with our topic on innovation.



Ms Cherry Khoo, Co-Founder & Director, Advanced Ophthalmic Innovations Pte Ltd and Aereus Scientific Pte Ltd



Dr Jared Poon, Principal Consultant, Counter Fictiona

Using the lizard as a metaphor, Dr Poon asked if the audience thought of innovation as something that would come out of nowhere, appeared alone, and accompanied by a lot of screaming (by those who encounter it). Or would innovation be a forest? One that thrived best in mostly calm conditions, connected to many things.

With everyone's thoughts piqued by the questions, he interjected that while the mRNA vaccine was implemented during crisis, much of the development and research was done during peace time offered a conclusion that **while good innovation could happen during crises, so much more good innovation happened in 99 percent of history and our lives without being in crises.**

OF PSYCHE AND HISTORY



Dr Habeebul Rahman, Senior Consultant, Psychiatry, Tan Tock Seng Hospital

As the audience remain divided in their opinions and a flurry of comments indicating support for both sides flooded the online engagement channel for the event, the baton for the final lap were passed on to the closing speakers.

Dr Habeebul Rahman, who was a returning debater from the previous FACEOFF in 2019, took centrestage with a confident stride in the face of a formidable opponent and audience.

He pointed out that, **in crisis we select, we do not produce.** We select what we have produced or are familiar with during peace time. The results of our selection at this time is immediate and give instant feedback data, thus proof that it was creative and successful.

When there are no options for selection, we take a gamble. As an experiment, he urged the audience to think of a fruit with the letter 'N' in a matter of seconds, and proved that most did not think of nectarine in a stressed induced time.

We want to rush back to how we were. While we are built to stretch, we want to go back to normalcy as soon as possible.

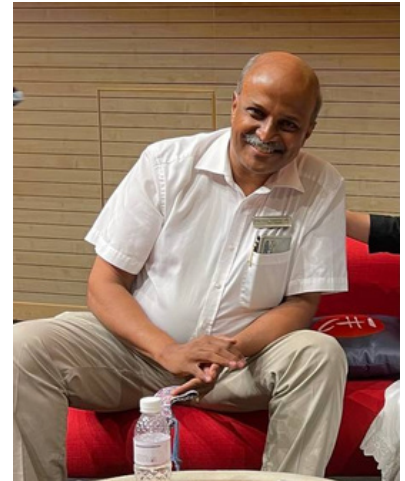


He gives an analogy where someone drunk would tell themselves “I’ll never get drunk again”, but as expected, it would be forgotten and would be remembered only when they get drunk again. More often than not we forget, and not sustain our efforts. He posits that **creativity, commitment and curiosity are the real producers of sustainable and impactful innovation.**

Prof Tambyah, in his rebuttal, cited examples over time where crises drove innovations, from the invention of compound 606 for treatment of widespread syphilis which opened the door to the whole antibiotic world, which delivered more impact than anything else in human medicine or history, to the invention of the simple plaster to treat broken bones, and the practice of hand washing.

He posited that people tend to not want to rock the boat during peace time, thus resulting in how innovations were best developed during a crisis, when the need was urgent.

Prof Tambyah closed his argument saying, **you would not want to wonder if you should have spent more time in the office or if you should/could have done something impactful during a crisis for healthcare.**



Prof Paul Tambyah, Senior Consultant, Infectious Diseases, National University Hospital

THE UPSWING



With a tightly fought debate, the audience were tasked with voting their position after being presented with the arguments on both sides. With the results hanging solely on the votes, the intense atmosphere was finally diffused as the results flashed onscreen.

In a turn of events, the opposition team of Ms Sim-Devadas, Dr Poon and Dr Habeebul emerged as winners! They had succeeded in swinging the popular vote to their favour, as the audience opinion tipped towards them at 55 percent, an increase from 34 percent at the start of FACEOFF.

Pegged as a popular choice based on audience reaction and also solely at the Chairwoman’s discretion, Dr Sue Anne Toh awarded the Best Speaker to Dr Habeebul for his presentation.

In the end, the biggest takeaway from this year’s FACEOFF debate would be that no one should wait for a crisis to produce the most impactful and sustainable healthcare innovations. Together with the Centre for Healthcare Innovation, today’s innovations would prepare healthcare for tomorrow’s challenges.

Relive the excitement and action this year’s FACEOFF debate [here!](#)



WHATS NEXT?

9 SEPT HEALTHCARE INNOVATION MATCH 2022

Healthcare InnoMatch 2022's expanded version will feature even more start-ups competing for more funding to test-bed their solutions within our healthcare clusters.



4 NOV FLAGSHIP EVENT

Get ready to change your mindset and be galvanised into action as we unpack the ultimate CHI INNOVATE experience here! Standby to be part of the conversation in our centrestage sessions, panel discussions and exhibitions! Date will be unveiled soon!



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