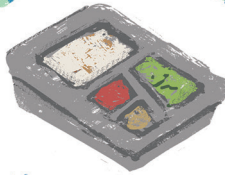


THE PANDEMIC COOKBOOK

SOME VOICES AND DISHES IN THE
YEARS OF A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

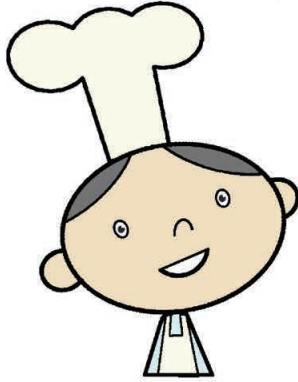


COMPILED AND JUMBLED UP BY

HSU LI YANG & SONNY LIEW



TO PREPARE FOR
A PANDEMIC, HERE ARE
SOME OF THE THINGS
YOU MAY NEED.



EXCESS CAPACITY IN YOUR HOSPITALS.

ENOUGH HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF.

A LOT OF TAPE.

BORDER CONTROLS.

FISCAL CAPACITY.

MASKS.

OTHER PPE*.

* Personal Protection Equipment

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES.

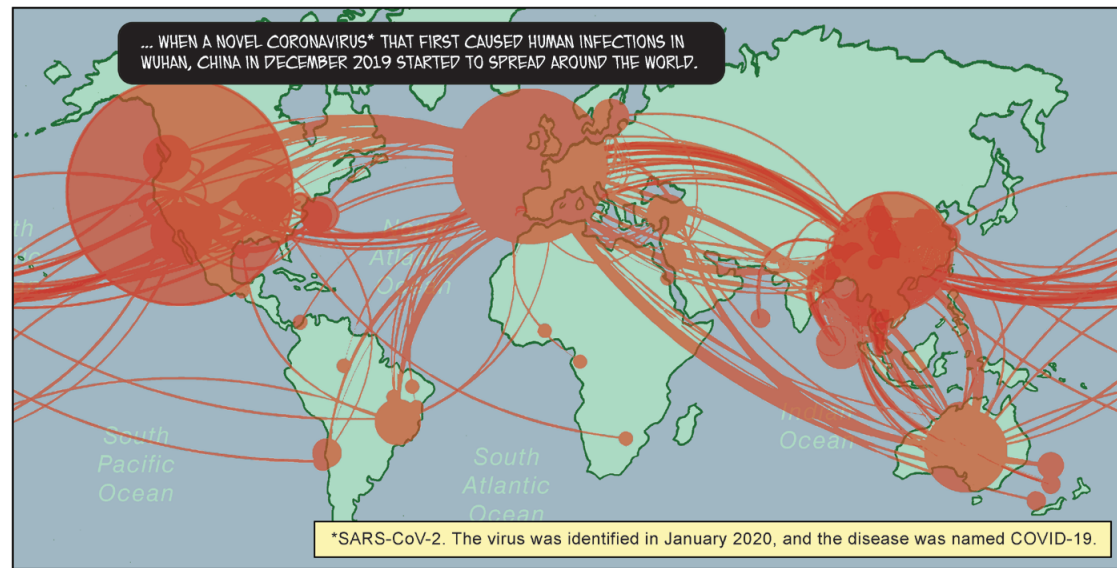
EVENTUALLY, EFFECTIVE VACCINES AND DRUGS.

THERE ARE ALSO LESS TANGIBLE FACTORS ...

... LIKE HOW MUCH PEOPLE TRUST THE AUTHORITIES OR BELIEVE IN SCIENCE, AND THE STATE OF GEOPOLITICAL AFFAIRS.

IN ANY CASE, WE HAVE LONG BEEN TOLD OF A NEED TO PREPARE FOR A GLOBAL PANDEMIC ...

AND FROM EARLY 2020, SINGAPORE'S READINESS WAS PUT TO THE TEST ...



THE FIRST CASE WAS DETECTED HERE ON 23 JANUARY 2020 ...

... AND SINCE THEN, THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN ON A JOURNEY THAT HAS SEEN A LOCKDOWN, VACCINATION DRIVES AND VIRUS VARIANTS.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE STORIES ALONG THE WAY.

THE PANDEMIC COOKBOOK

SOME VOICES AND DISHES IN THE
YEARS OF A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

COMPILED AND JUMBLED UP BY
HSU LI YANG & SONNY LIEW

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Description: Singapore : Epigram Books, (2022)
Identifier(s): ISBN 978-981-49-8487-4 (paperback) | ISBN 978-981-49-8488-1 (ebook)
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First edition, October 2022.


EPIGRAM

Bento Box

A bento is a single-serving takeaway or packed meal. Its origins can be traced back to twelfth century Japan, where dried meals were prepared to be packed for work during the Kamakura Period (1192–1333 CE). The key distinguishing feature of a bento meal is the presence of dividers or compartments that separate out the ingredients or dishes in the bento container.

Already common in Singapore prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, its popularity soared soon after the virus appeared on our shores in early 2020, when individual concerns about infection, physical distancing measures, dining restrictions and work from home combined to produce a surge in takeaway and delivered meals. In many ways, the humble Japanese lunch box is the meal that most symbolises the pandemic over the past two years.

Contents

Chicken rice
(plus chilli sauce)

Chop suey mixed
vegetables

Imperial herbal chicken
thigh

Crab bite omelette

Chicken ngoh hiang

When the pandemic began, Elsie's Kitchen was one of the caterers engaged to provide meals for the staff at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

Each day, they would prepare around 400 packs of bento box meals for lunch and for dinner—about 25,000 meals per month.

Each meal would require approximately 100 kg of carbohydrates (rice, noodles, pasta, etc.), 75 kg of fresh vegetables and 60 kg of protein (fish, chicken or seafood).

All that food would be cooked in a single batch with the help of automation, overseen by four chefs. It would be packed by 13 food packers and delivered by a single driver to TTSH.

Meals were planned in bi-weekly cycles, with a focus on trying to avoid food fatigue and responding to feedback from the TTSH staff.

Elsie's Kitchen estimates some 70 unique meals were prepared, with vegetarian and non-vegetarian options available daily.

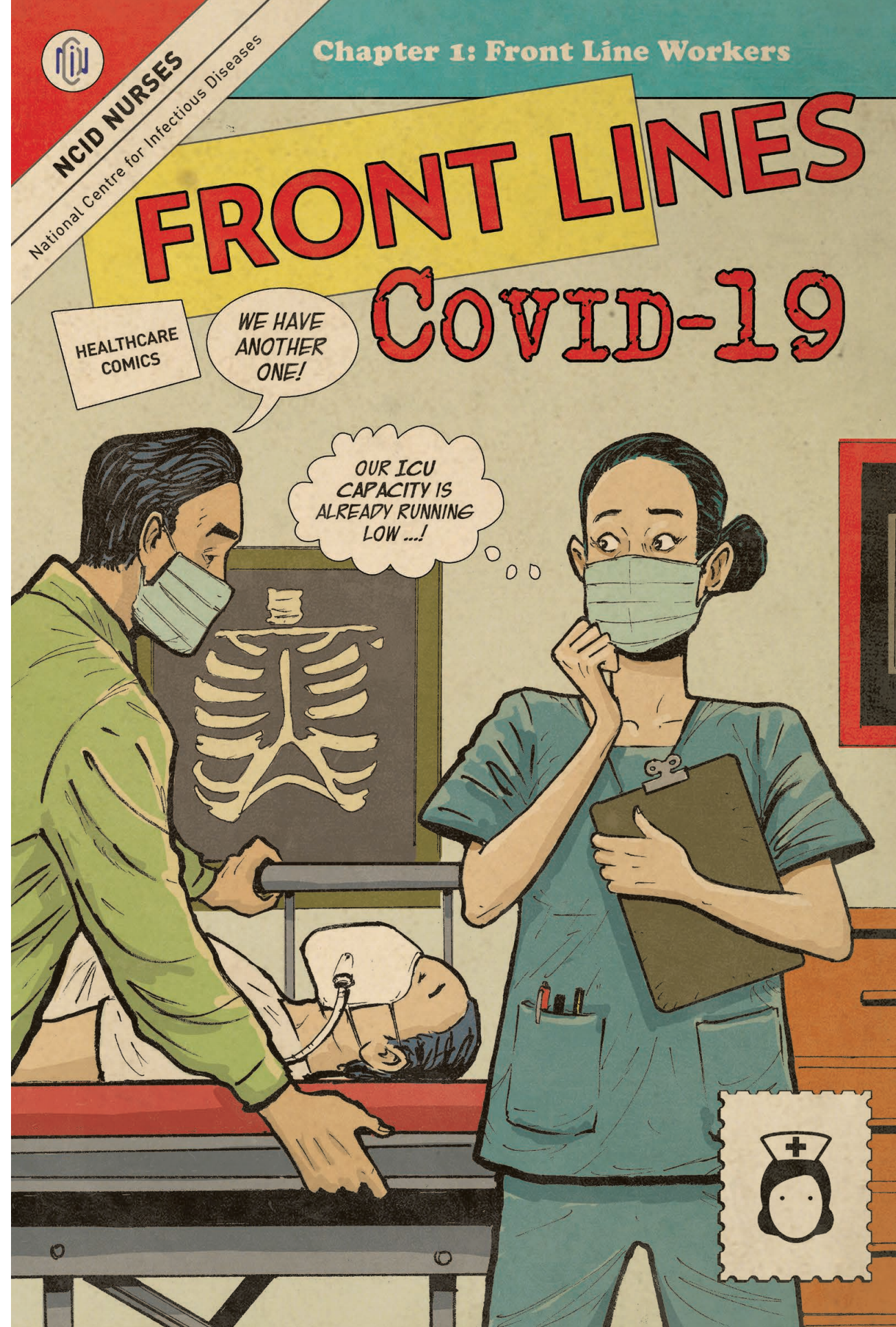
Options included stir fry mala mee tai mak, black pepper udon, spaghetti arrabiata with chicken ham, lotus leaf eight treasures glutinous rice, nasi lemak, mock chicken korma, deep fried silken tofu with pumpkin sauce, and more.



Bento Box

All direct speech in this book has been transcribed largely verbatim from recorded interviews, though it has been edited for narrative flow.

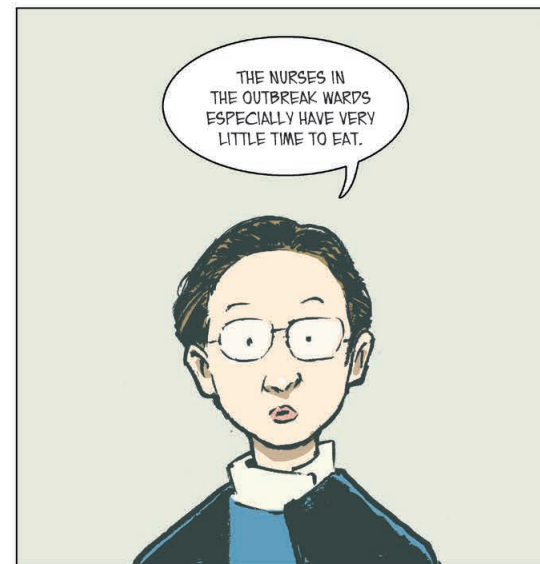
For the most part, we spoke to interviewees through Zoom and other online media, given the social distancing necessary during the pandemic, and the construction of conversations between some of the participants involved the splicing together of different interviews.





Sister Chen

Interview Date:
27 August 2021



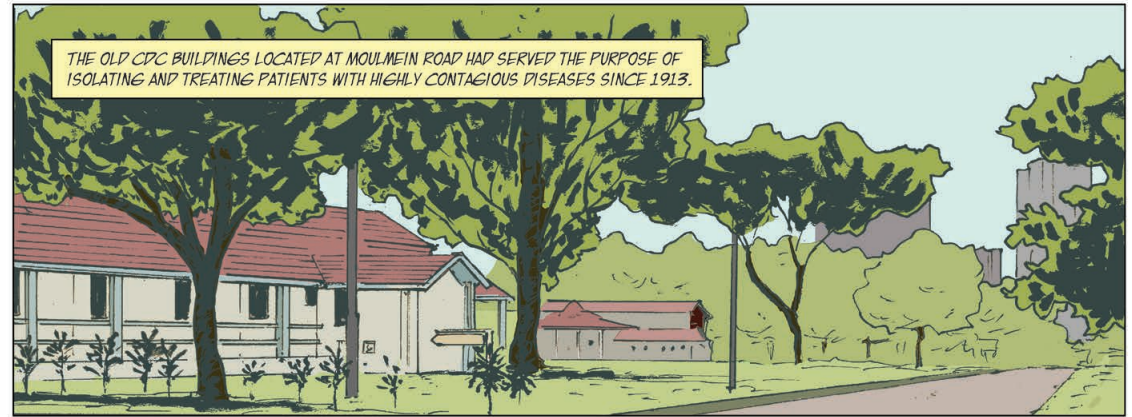
SISTERS CHEN AND MARGARET ARE NURSES AT THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES (NCID), AT JALAN TAN TOCK SENG, WHICH TOOK OVER THE OPERATIONS OF THE VENERABLE COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CENTRE (CDC) ON 13 DEC 2018.



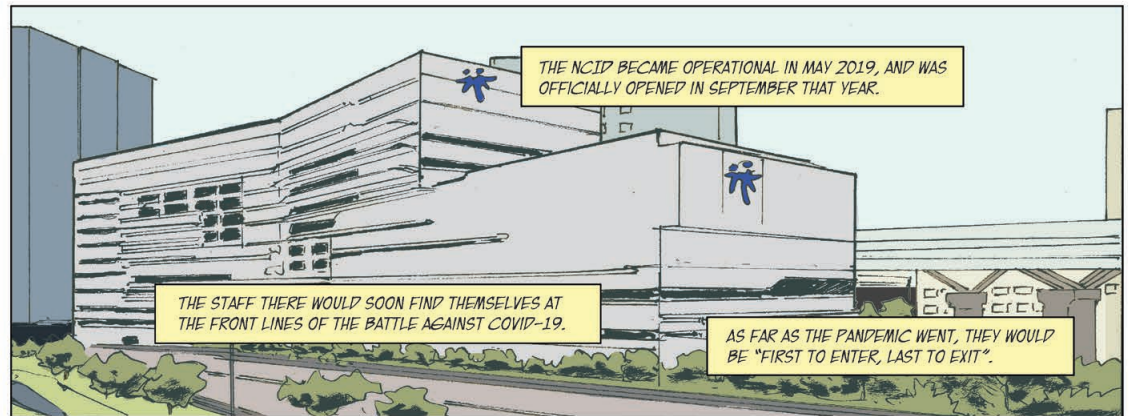
Dr Margaret Soon,
Director, Nursing



Ms Chen Jing,
Senior Nurse Manager



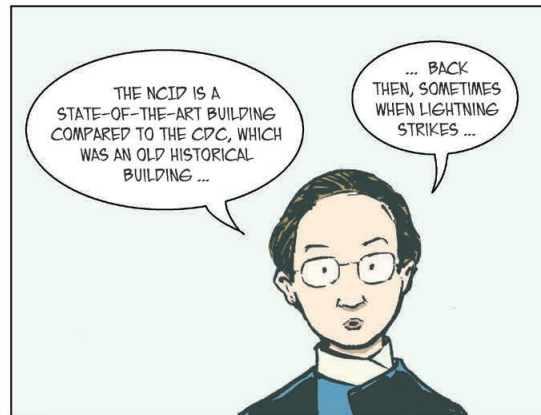
THE OLD CDC BUILDINGS LOCATED AT MOULIN ROAD HAD SERVED THE PURPOSE OF ISOLATING AND TREATING PATIENTS WITH HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS DISEASES SINCE 1913.



THE NCID BECAME OPERATIONAL IN MAY 2019, AND WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED IN SEPTEMBER THAT YEAR.

THE STAFF THERE WOULD SOON FIND THEMSELVES AT THE FRONT LINES OF THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19.

AS FAR AS THE PANDEMIC WENT, THEY WOULD BE "FIRST TO ENTER, LAST TO EXIT".



THE NCID IS A STATE-OF-THE-ART BUILDING COMPARED TO THE CDC, WHICH WAS AN OLD HISTORICAL BUILDING ...

... BACK THEN, SOMETIMES WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES ...



OUR LIGHT IS ALL GONE!



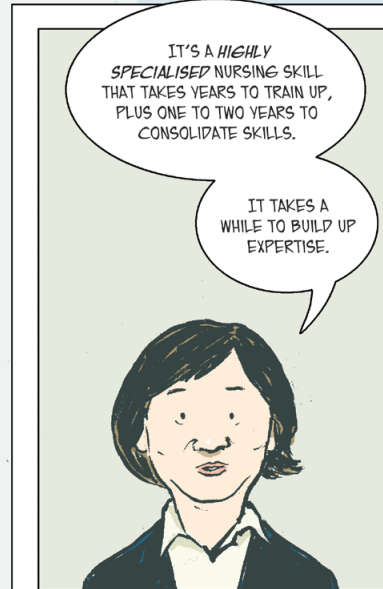
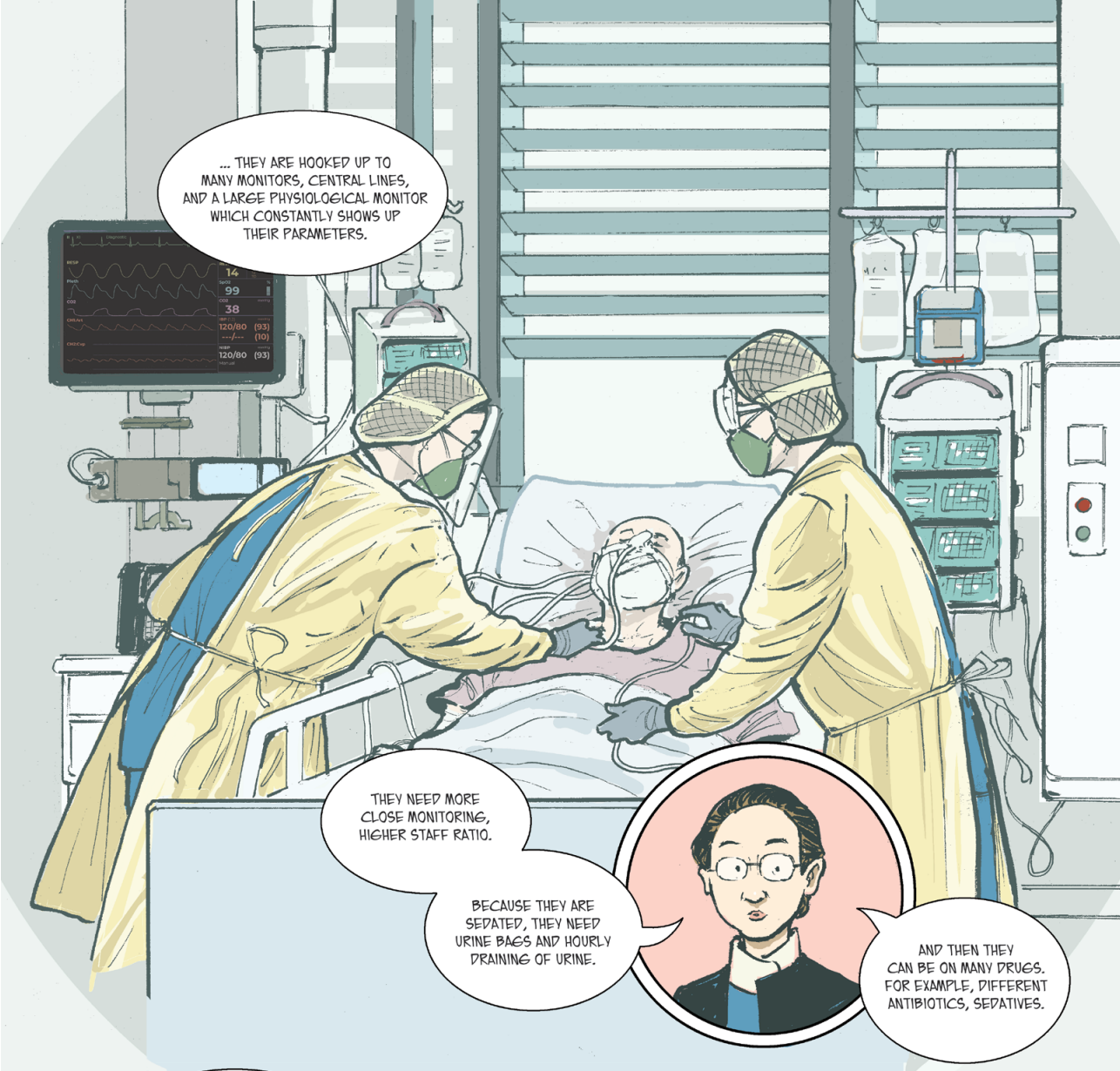
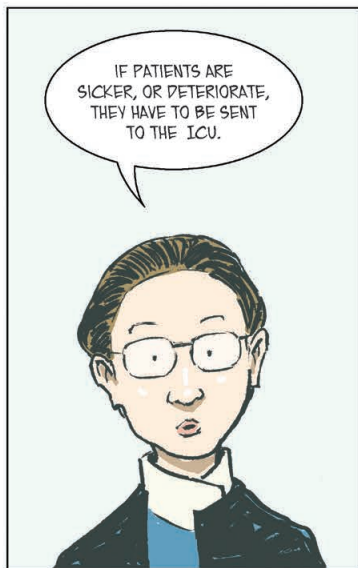
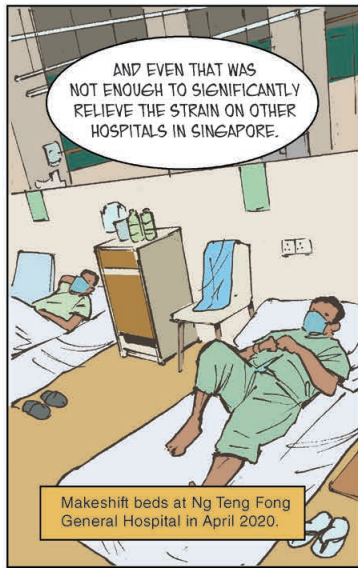
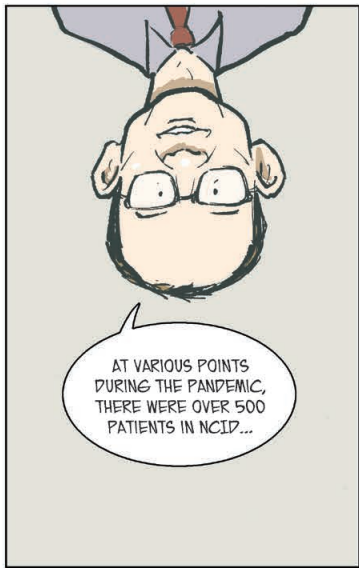
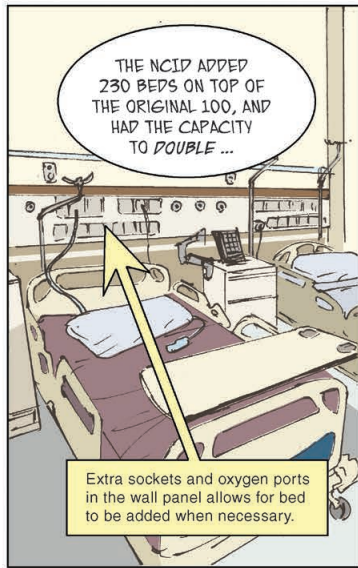
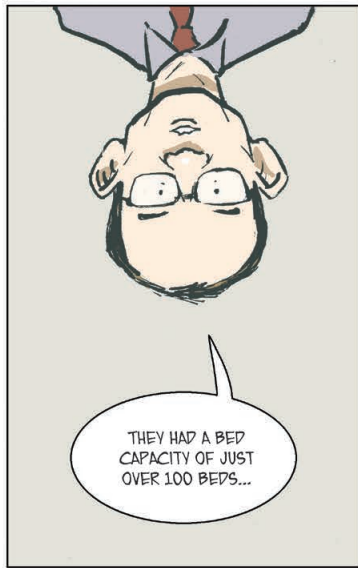
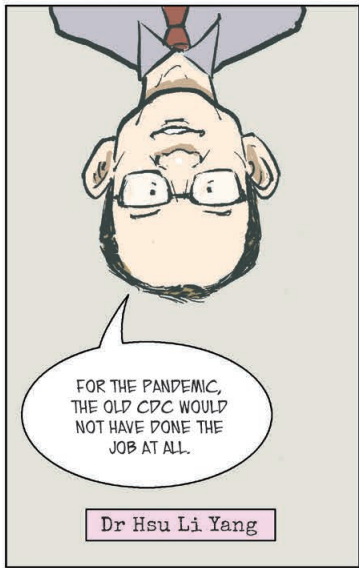
THE MOVE WAS AKIN TO SETTING UP A NEW HOUSE, MAKING SURE FACILITIES ARE RUNNING.

THERE WAS A SETUP PHASE, A MOVE-IN PHASE, AND TRAINING PHASE...



THE NURSES WHO WORKED AT THE CDC TELL ME THEY MISS THE NATURE, THE TREES, THE GRASS, THE FRESH AROMA OF THE MORNING DEW.

THEY LOVE THE CATS AND BIRDS THERE, THE GARDENS AND WILDLIFE.





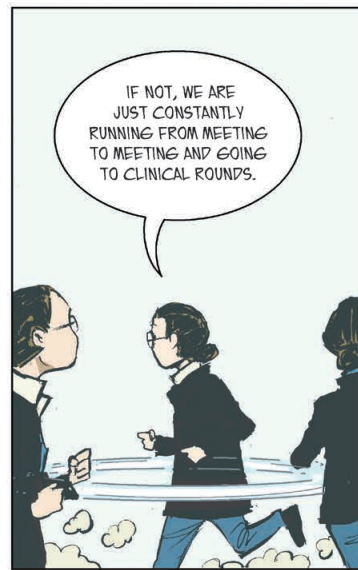
IT'S LIKE THE TIME REALLY FLIES.

WE FELT THIS YEAR WAS JUST STOLEN AWAY FROM US.



WE TRY TO BOUNCE OURSELVES UP...

BEFORE THE START OF MEETINGS, WE LISTEN TO SOOTHING MUSIC, DO A TWO-MINUTE MINDFULNESS MEDITATION.

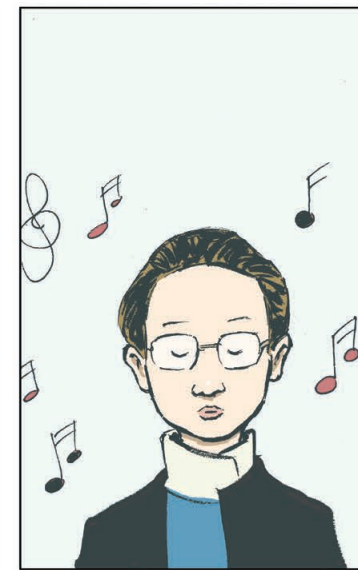


IF NOT, WE ARE JUST CONSTANTLY RUNNING FROM MEETING TO MEETING AND GOING TO CLINICAL ROUNDS.

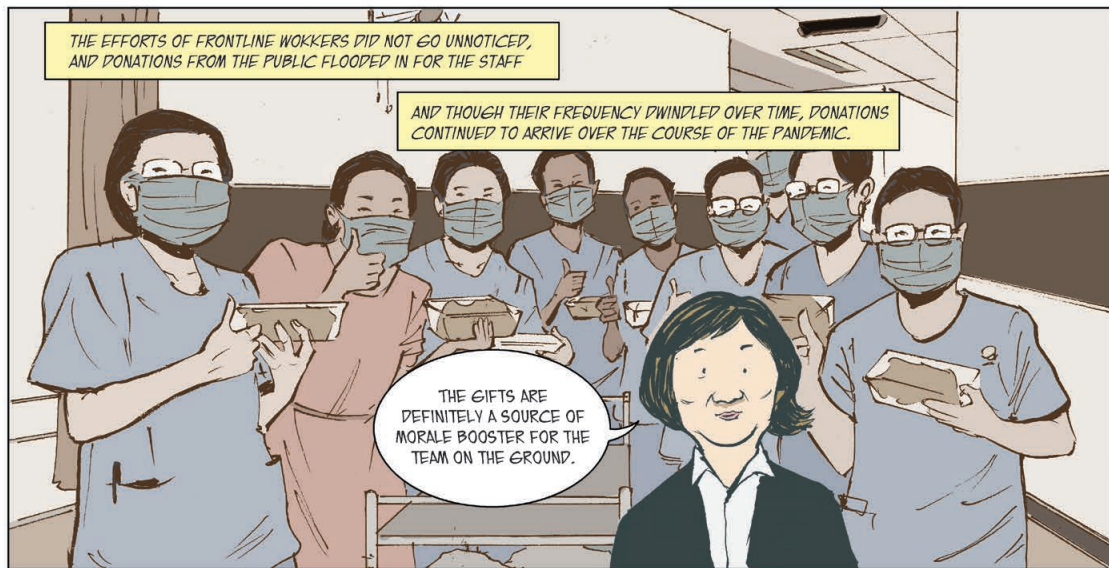


I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN WAS THE LAST LEAVE I TOOK.

I HAVEN'T EVEN CLEARED LAST YEAR'S LEAVE!



I JUST NEED A DAY OF DOING NOTHING.



THE EFFORTS OF FRONTLINE WORKERS DID NOT GO UNNOTICED, AND DONATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC FLOODED IN FOR THE STAFF

AND THOUGH THEIR FREQUENCY DWINDLED OVER TIME, DONATIONS CONTINUED TO ARRIVE OVER THE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC.

THE GIFTS ARE DEFINITELY A SOURCE OF MORALE BOOSTER FOR THE TEAM ON THE GROUND.



FATIGUE IS REAL, WEIGHING ON US VERY HEAVILY.



WHATEVER OPPORTUNITY WE HAVE, WE TRY TO LET THE STAFF GO ON A DAY OF BREAK, WE TELL THEM TO GO AND REST.



BUT AS A LEADER I'M VERY BLESSED.



THEY REALLY ENJOY SWEET TREATS LIKE BUBBLE TEA, ICE CREAM.

IT'S SOMETHING EXCITING TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN THE MIDST OF WORKING IN FULL PPE.



WHEN I HAVE ANY TIME OFF, I TEND TO COOK QUICK SIMPLE THINGS. EASY COMFY FOOD LIKE MEE SUA SOUP.



THIS TRADITION ACTUALLY CARRIED OVER FROM THE CDC.

Jamilah

THERE WAS A SENIOR STAFF, NURSE JAMILAH, WHO INTRODUCED ME TO THE DISH.



THE NURSES WILL TELL ME: WE ARE WITH YOU - THEY SEE THEIR PURPOSE IN NCID.



SO IT GETS EVERYBODY BOOSTED UP 'COS THEY SEE WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.



WITH A WONDERFUL WORK FORCE ALONGSIDE YOU, YOU ARE COMPENSATED.

Chai Poh Mee Sua Soup

(Preserved Radish Wheat Vermicelli Soup)

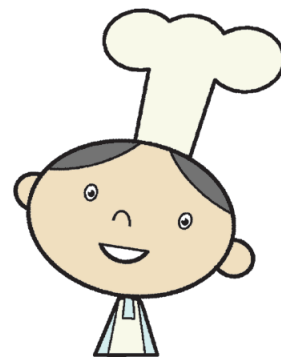
“Chai poh” is Hokkien for preserved daikon (Chinese radish). This sweet-salty fermented vegetable is ubiquitous and cheap in Asian supermarkets around the world, and is used in many Chinese recipes, particularly those for comfort food. Perhaps the most well-known recipe (at least on Google) is “chai poh” omelette.

Fermentation was one of the activities that saw a spike in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people developed new (or returned to old) hobbies as they spent more time at home, with the more popular hobbies being baking, cooking, exercising, video games and arts & crafts.

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp groundnut oil
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 1 packet chai poh
- 1.5–2 L water
- 2 cubes chicken or ikan bilis stock
- 8–12 meatballs or fish balls
- 6 stalks baby cabbage or seasonal vegetables
- 4–6 bundles mee sua
- 1 stalk spring onion, finely chopped

RECIPE PROVIDED BY
SISTER CHEN, BASED
ON ONE BY SENIOR STAFF
NURSE JAMILAH MD ZIN
(RETIRED).



1. Heat the groundnut oil in a wok or pan.
2. Add the garlic and fry the chai poh till fragrant.
3. Pour in the water and add the chicken or ikan bilis stock cubes, then bring the stock to a boil.
4. Add the meatballs or fish balls, then boil till cooked.
5. Add the baby cabbage or seasonal vegetables and mee sua, then cook for 2–3 minutes.
6. Garnish with the spring onion.
7. Serve immediately.



Chai Poh Mee Sua Soup

100_{PC}

\$11⁷⁵

HEALTHCARE WORKERS TOY SET

MADE OF DURABLE PLASTIC, EACH WITH ITS OWN BASE.

SOURCED FROM SINGAPORE AND COUNTRIES IN THE REGION, PRIMARILY PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA, BUT ALSO INCREASINGLY FROM COUNTRIES SUCH AS CHINA, INDIA AND MYANMAR!



EACH KIT CONTAINS:

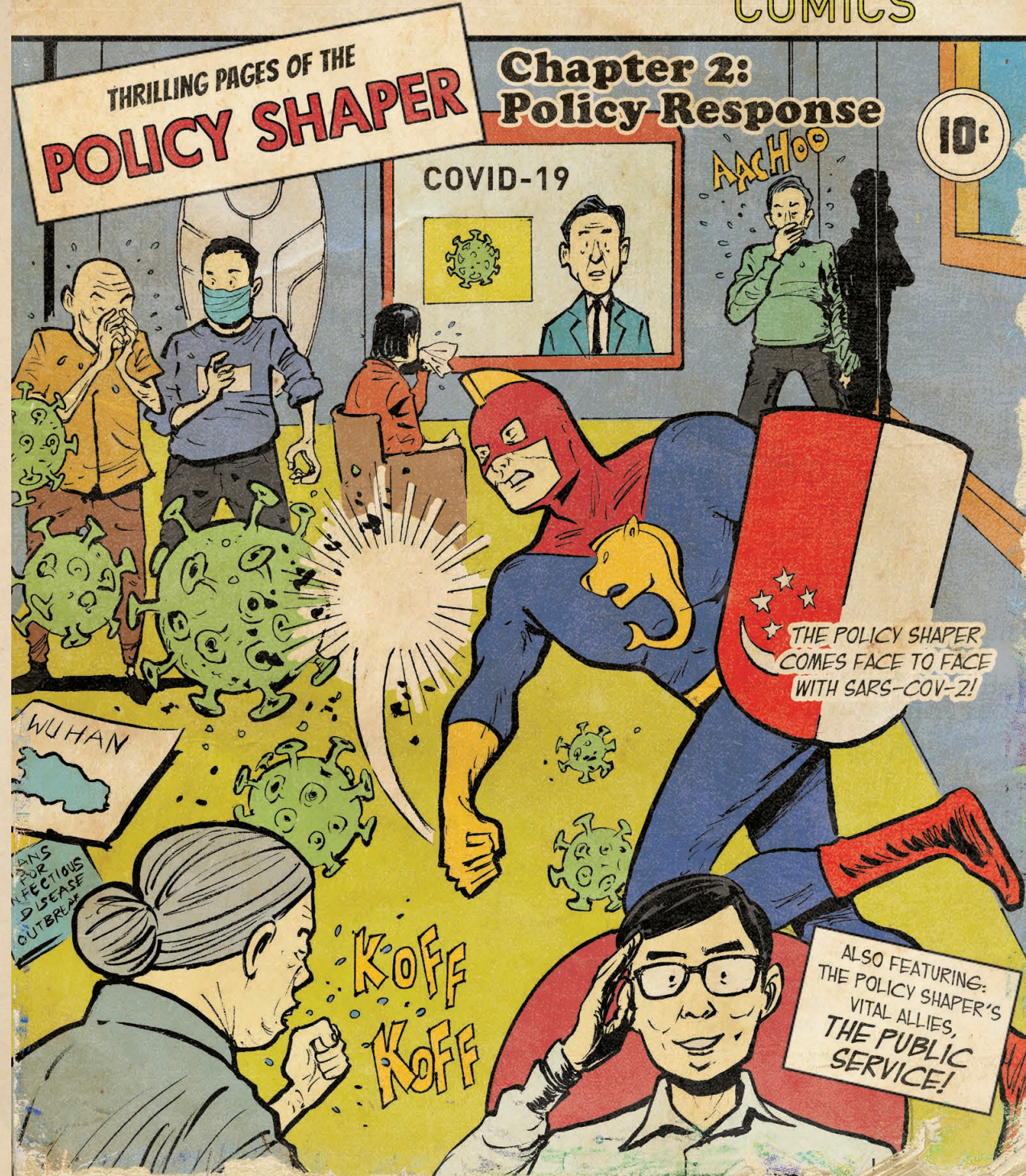
- 61 Nurses
- 20 Doctors
- 4 Pharmacists
- 1 Dietitian
- 4 Radiographers
- 3 Laboratory technologists
- 2 Physiotherapists
- 1 Occupational therapist
- 1 Psychologist
- 2 Medical social workers and more!

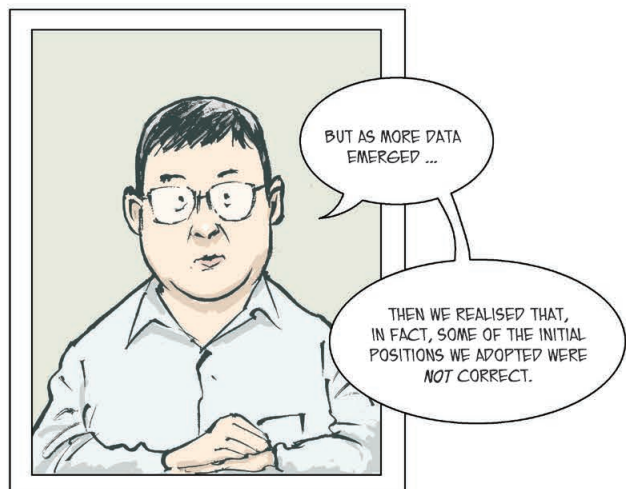
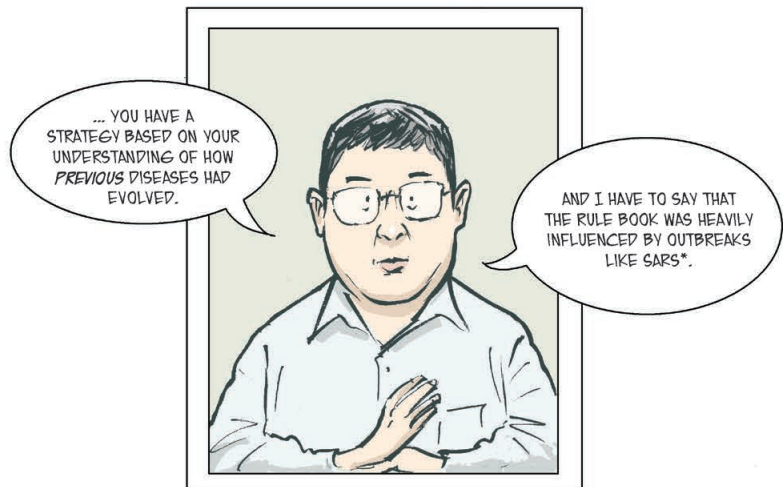
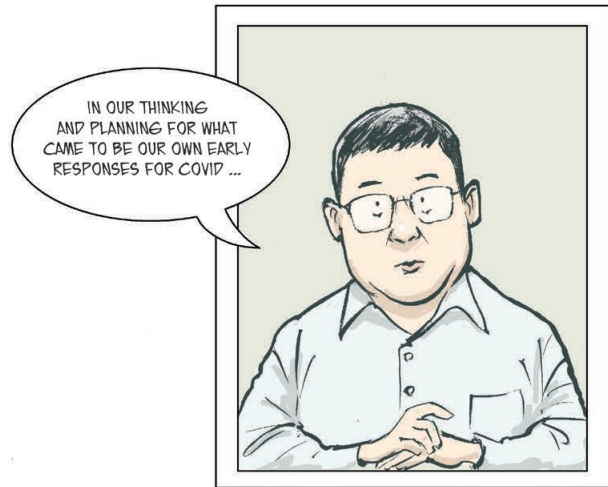
During the normal course of operations, unused hospital beds and excess staff would be regarded as inefficiencies. Nonetheless, during a large outbreak, a rapid surge of patients can quickly overwhelm "lean" healthcare systems that cannot scale up fast enough to have sufficient beds and trained healthcare workers to care for them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that it is important that healthcare systems have adequate surge capacity even if these cannot be fully utilised in between major outbreaks and pandemics.

POLICY SHAPER

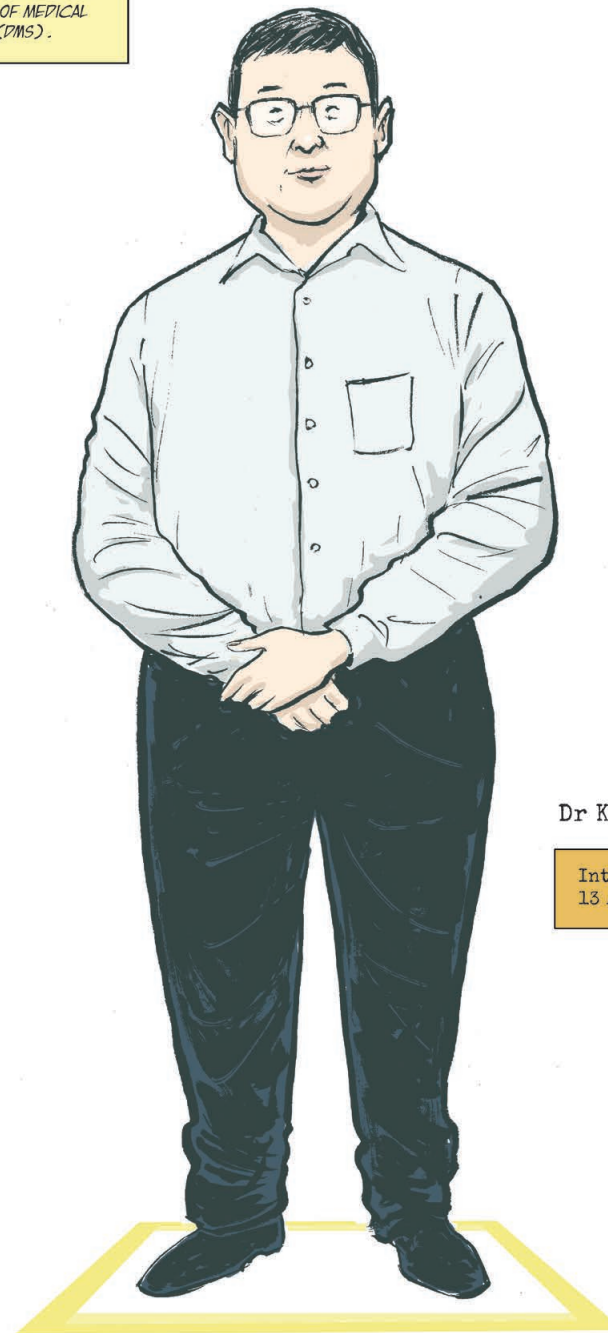
COMICS





* SARS: Severe acute respiratory syndrome. See endnotes for more information.

DR KENNETH MAK IS THE DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL SERVICES (DMS).



THE TITULAR HEAD OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION IN SINGAPORE, HE WORKS CLOSELY WITH POLICY MAKERS AND THE CIVIL SERVICE, WHILE ALSO AUTHORISING ACTIONS TAKEN UNDER THE INFECTIOUS DISEASES ACT.



WE STARTED OUT WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT PERHAPS WE *DON'T* NEED TO WEAR A MASK.

OR IF WE WEAR A MASK, IT SHOULD BE THOSE WHO WERE INFECTED...



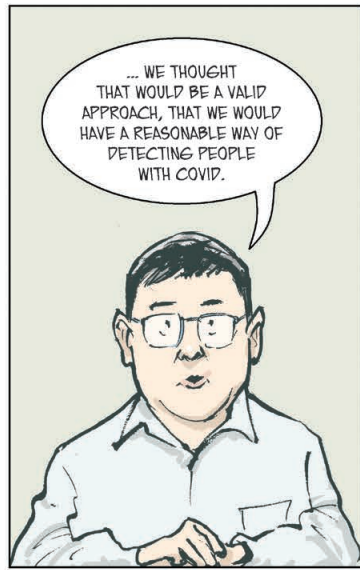
IT WAS BASED ON THE PREMISE THAT PRACTICALLY EVERYONE WHO WAS GOING TO BE INFECTED WOULD BE *SYMPTOMATIC*.



BECAUSE PRACTICALLY EVERYONE WITH SARS HAD FEVER, AND IN FACT IT BECAME THE *SINE QVA NON* OF MANAGING SARS...



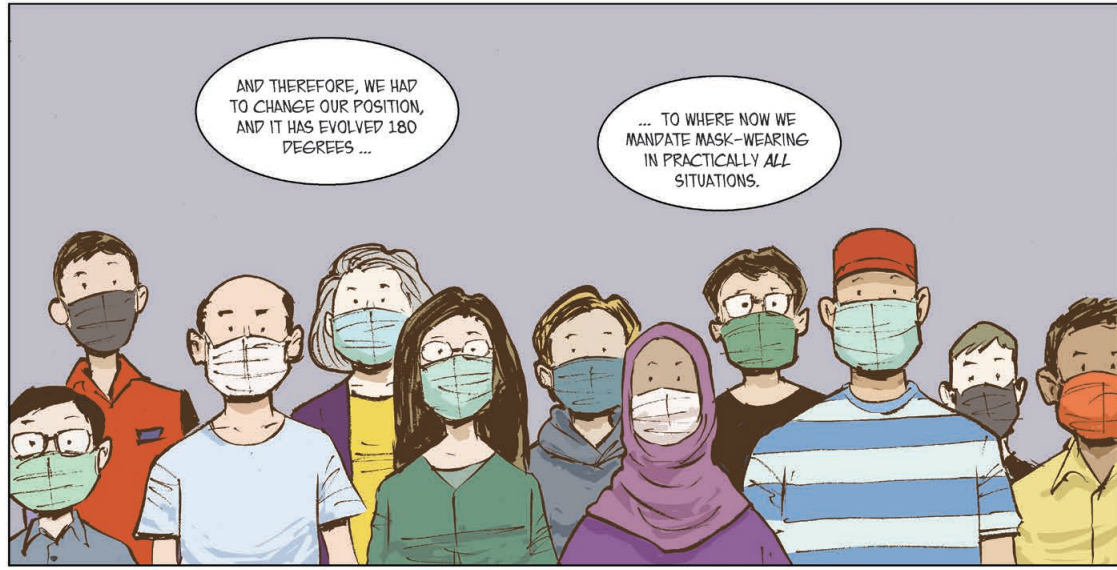
... BY HAVING *TEMPERATURE SCREENING* SYSTEMS IN PLACE AT ENTRANCES TO MALLS, OR HOSPITALS, AT AIRPORTS ...



... WE THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE A VALID APPROACH, THAT WE WOULD HAVE A REASONABLE WAY OF DETECTING PEOPLE WITH COVID.

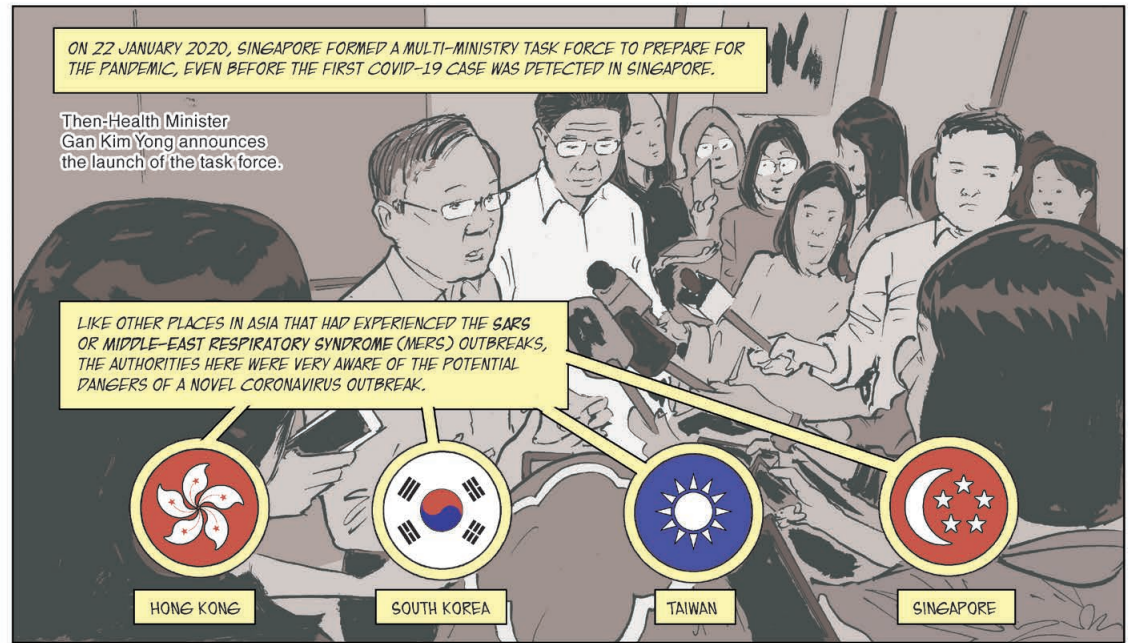


BUT EVIDENCE RAPIDLY GREW TO SHOW THAT EVEN *ASYMPTOMATIC* PEOPLE COULD HAVE INFECTION AND COULD BE INFECTIOUS.



AND THEREFORE, WE HAD TO CHANGE OUR POSITION, AND IT HAS EVOLVED 180 DEGREES ...

... TO WHERE NOW WE MANDATE MASK-WEARING IN PRACTICALLY *ALL* SITUATIONS.



ON 22 JANUARY 2020, SINGAPORE FORMED A MULTI-MINISTRY TASK FORCE TO PREPARE FOR THE PANDEMIC, EVEN BEFORE THE FIRST COVID-19 CASE WAS DETECTED IN SINGAPORE.

Then-Health Minister Gan Kim Yong announces the launch of the task force.

LIKE OTHER PLACES IN ASIA THAT HAD EXPERIENCED THE SARS OR MIDDLE-EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (MERS) OUTBREAKS, THE AUTHORITIES HERE WERE VERY AWARE OF THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK.



HONG KONG



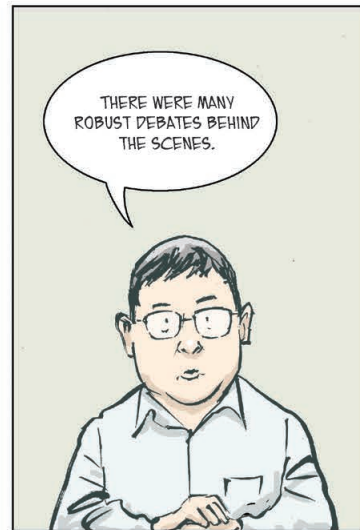
SOUTH KOREA



TAIWAN



SINGAPORE



THERE WERE MANY ROBUST DEBATES BEHIND THE SCENES.



BELIEVE ME OR NOT, SOME OF THESE SESSIONS COULD HAVE QUITE A BIT OF EMOTIONS.



WE ARE STEPPING ON STONES CROSSING THE RIVER, IN A VERY DELIBERATE MANNER, WITHOUT A PRECEDING PLAYBOOK.



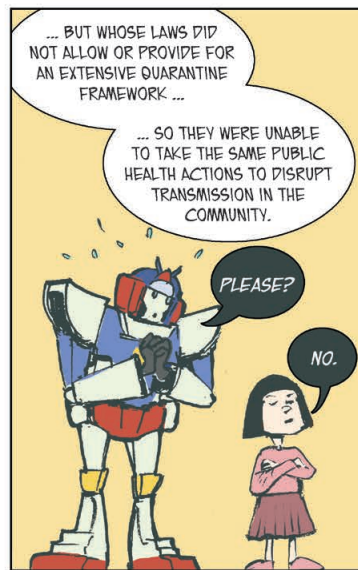
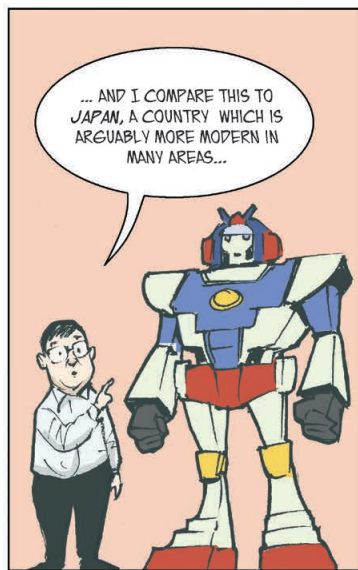
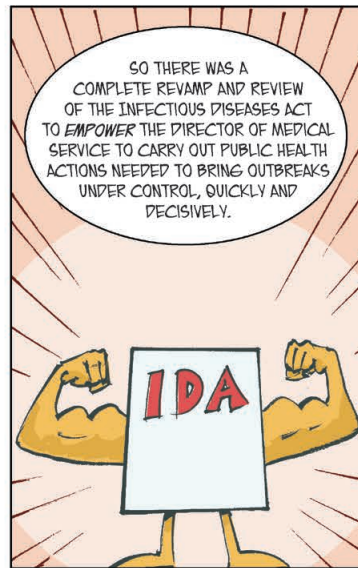
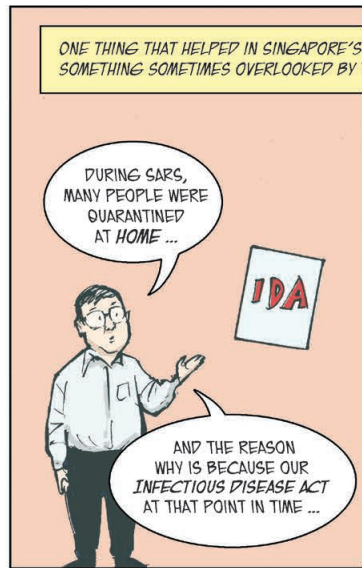
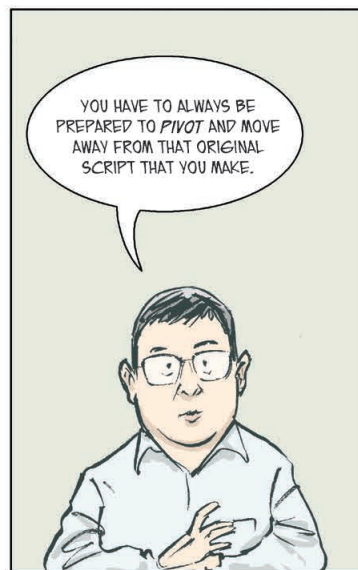
AMONG THE DECISION-MAKERS, WE HAVE THOSE WHO ARE MORE *RISK-AVERSE* COMPARED TO THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED TO TAKE A LITTLE BIT MORE RISK.



SO ROBUST DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATIONS ACTUALLY UNDERPIN THE DECISIONS WE MAKE, WHICH ULTIMATELY MERGE AS OUR DECLARED POLICY.



IT'S A COORDINATED TEAM-BASED APPROACH, A "WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT" APPROACH, THAT HELPED US TO GET OUR ACTIONS IN PLACE.



OTHER EFFORTS TO CONTAIN COVID-19 LIKE TRACETOGETHER* MET WITH SOME RESISTANCE OVER PRIVACY CONCERNS ...

TraceTogether data can be used for criminal investigations: Desmond Tan

Dhany Osman · Senior News & Video Producer
4 January 2021 · 2 min read

"I TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS MISTAKE."

"AND I DEEPLY REGRET THE CONSTERNATION AND ANXIETY CAUSED."

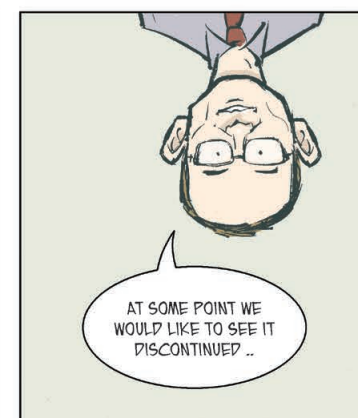
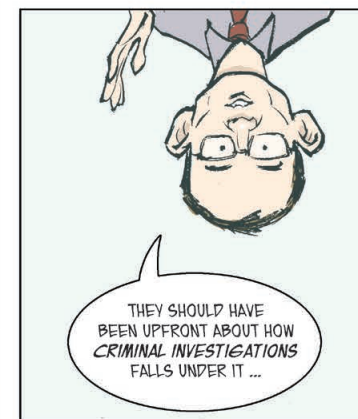
Vivian Balakrishnan
Minister-in-charge of the Smart Nation Initiative

* TraceTogether and SafeEntry are government-built digital systems implemented in Singapore to facilitate contact tracing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

... ESPECIALLY WHEN NEWS BROKE ON 4 JAN 2021 THAT THE DATA COLLECTED COULD BE (AND IN FACT HAD BEEN) USED FOR CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS, DESPITE EARLIER ASSURANCES IT WOULD ONLY BE USED FOR CONTACT TRACING.

TRENDING

- Japan's ex-princess leaves court that could not accept her marriage to 'commoner' husband
- Thailand returns to Germany with 250-strong entourage and 30 poodles
- 35-year-old among 14 more COVID deaths in Singapore; 3,099 new cases



**As it turned out, TraceTogether was gradually phased out from April 2022—see page 121.

LIKE MANY SINGAPOREANS, DR MAK AND HIS FAMILY FOUND THEMSELVES ORDERING A LOT MORE DELIVERY FOOD DURING THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE PANDEMIC.

DELIVERY WAS ONE WAY OF JUST PROVIDING A LITTLE BIT OF VARIETY, REDUCE THE MONOTONY ASSOCIATED WITH EATING THE SAME TYPE OF FOOD DAY IN, DAY OUT.

THEY WERE AN IMPORTANT LIFE-SUSTAINER IN THOSE TIMES WHEN ALL OF US HAD TO WORK FROM HOME.

THANK YOU!

BUT THEN SUDDENLY YOU REALISE THAT YOU'RE PUTTING ON A LITTLE BIT MORE WEIGHT.

SO IT BECAME A DECISION FOR ME TO RESOLVE TO BE A BIT MORE CONSCIOUS OF WHAT TO EAT.

NOWADAYS, I TEND TO GO FOR LESS CARBS, AND SO I AM EATING LESS RICE.

BASICALLY A SIMPLE MEAL FOR ME, SOMETHING EASIER TO COOK AT HOME, LIKE VEGGIES AND SALMON.

AT THE TIME WE SPOKE WITH DR MAK, SINGAPORE WAS IN A PHASE 2 (HEIGHTENED ALERT) SITUATION...

Tightening To Phase 2 (Heightened Alert) 22 July to 18 Aug 2021	
Minimise Interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay home as much as possible. If you have to go out, keep it short. 	F&B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No dining in at all F&B outlets. Only takeaway and delivery allowed.
Social Gatherings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group size cap at 2 persons or social gathering. Maximum 2 gatherings per day. 	No Indoor Mask-off Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor mask-off activities are suspended.

IT'S BEEN PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T GET PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER.

MEALTIMES WITH THE EXTENDED FAMILY BECOME VERY PRECIOUS ONES...

IT'S NOT REALLY THE FOOD THAT BECOMES THE IMPORTANT THING ...

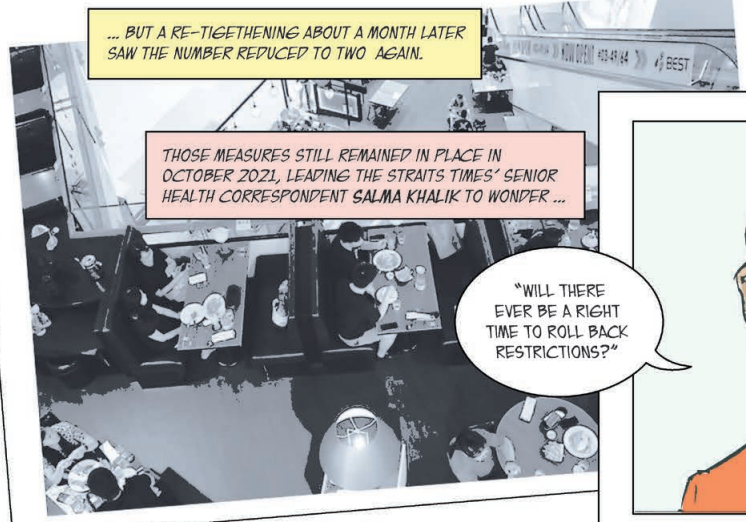
IT'S ACTUALLY THE INTERACTIONS AND THE ABILITY JUST TO SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS.

I DO CHERISH THE TIME I SPEND WITH MY PARENTS, MY WIFE, AS WELL MY IN-LAWS.

WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TOWARDS DINING OUT AND BEING ABLE TO NOW HAVE A WHOLE FAMILY GO OUT TOGETHER.

RESTRICTIONS WERE INDEED EASED FROM 19 AUGUST 2021, ALLOWING UP TO FIVE PEOPLE TO DINE TOGETHER IN F&B OUTLETS ...

Covid-19: Social gathering, dine-in cap cut to 2 persons from Sept 27 - Oct 24; work-from-home to be default arrangement



... BUT A RE-TIGHTENING ABOUT A MONTH LATER SAW THE NUMBER REDUCED TO TWO AGAIN.

THOSE MEASURES STILL REMAINED IN PLACE IN OCTOBER 2021, LEADING THE STRAITS TIMES' SENIOR HEALTH CORRESPONDENT SALMA KHALIK TO WONDER ...

"WILL THERE EVER BE A RIGHT TIME TO ROLL BACK RESTRICTIONS?"

Covid-19: Social gathering, dine-in cap cut to 2 persons from Sept 27 - Oct 24; work-from-home to be default arrangement
BY DARYL CHOO
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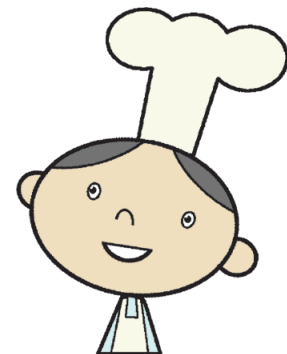
Salmon and Broccoli

Farmed salmon are part of the minority of food fish sold in Singapore that are sustainable, according to a World Wide Fund for Nature Singapore report in 2016. Despite disruptions in aquaculture worldwide as a consequence of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, salmon supplies to Singapore were not significantly affected.

The price of salmon did not fluctuate much during this period, not even when Jurong Fishery Port—which handles approximately 30% of Singapore’s seafood imports—was closed for two weeks between 17 July and 2 August 2021 as a consequence of the Delta variant outbreak at the Port.

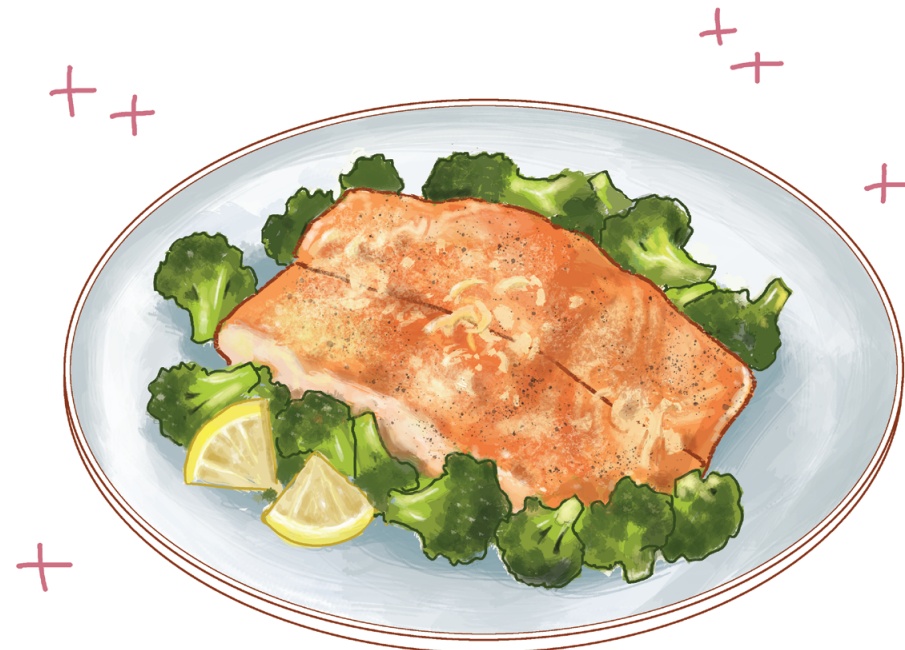
Ingredients

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 (200 g) salmon fillets
- salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 2 cups fresh broccoli
- 1 lemon, cut in half

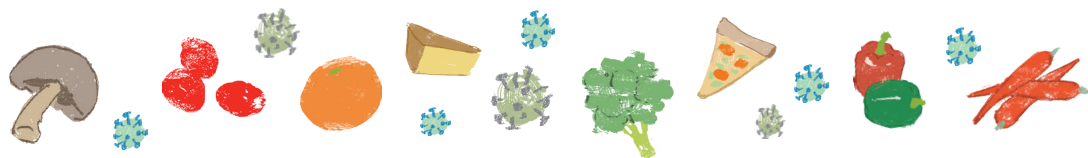


RECIPE ADAPTED FROM ONE FOUND ON THE INTERNET, AS WE WERE UNABLE TO OBTAIN THE ACTUAL ONE USED!

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
2. Add shallots and garlic and cook until soft and fragrant, about 3 minutes.
3. Sprinkle salmon fillets with salt and pepper on both sides.
4. Place fillets, skin-side up, in the skillet; cook for 4 minutes. Flip salmon skin-side down and spread shallots and garlic over top.
5. Add broccoli around the fillets, stirring to coat in oil.
6. Squeeze lemon halves over salmon and broccoli.
7. Cover the skillet and steam until salmon is cooked through and flakes easily with a fork, about 5 minutes.



Salmon and Broccoli



When COVID-19 started to spread around the world in early 2020, Singapore's readiness to deal with a global pandemic was put to the test. There were both wise decisions and missteps along the way, while questions about scientific consensus, trade-offs and vaccines swirled about in our hyperconnected age of social media.

The Pandemic Cookbook revisits those early days of unprecedented global disruption, including social distancing rules, Circuit Breakers, migrant worker dormitory lockdowns, elections and TraceTogether controversies.

Based on interviews with frontline workers, journalists, policymakers, academics, migrant workers and more, infectious diseases expert Dr Hsu Li Yang and Eisner-winning graphic novelist Sonny Liew present a unique recollection of Singapore's pandemic experience.

HSU LI YANG

Dr Hsu Li Yang is the Vice Dean of Global Health at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore. Over the past two years, he has been heavily involved in COVID-19 research and education, although his primary academic focus remains in the area of drug-resistant infections.



SONNY LIEW

Sonny Liew is the creator of *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, a New York Times and Amazon bestseller. It is the first graphic novel to win the Singapore Literature Prize, and has been translated into eight languages.



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