



## Investigating the investigator: probing into the life of the “Sherlock Holmes of the AED”.. and more? An interview with Andrew Ho-yin Chung

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When asked to name a notable polymath, the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes immediately comes to mind: a master of logical deduction, identity changeover, and even evader of death. Leaving the imaginary world of Holmes aside, one can draw considerable similarities between the much-loved detective and Dr Andrew Ho-yin Chung.

Dr Chung is currently an associate consultant of the Accident and Emergency Department (AED) in Queen Mary Hospital (QMH). He also serves as an Air Medical Officer (Air MO) at the Government Flying Service (GFS). In the meantime, he is active in publications and is a social media luminary. One may wonder how Dr Chung can possibly juggle so many commitments with his heavy workload in the AED. To decipher this enigma, we wove together pieces of his life story over a fruitful afternoon of conversation, out of which materialised a story of responsibility, love, and excellence.

### From humble beginnings

The beginning of Dr Chung’s relationship with medicine can be traced back to his life-changing childhood experience of losing a beloved family member. It came as a bolt out of the blue for his good-natured soul to witness the terrible grief of his usually cheerful family. Logical reasoning is not bound by age: if I could prevent death, he thought, they would become happy again. As such, saving lives became his lifelong aspiration.

Dr Chung was born into a grassroots family, for which a day out to Ocean Park was an unaffordable luxury. In retrospect, not only did his modest

upbringing equip him with the ability to resist the temptation of wealth and power and focus on his calling to save lives, but also intensified his love of adventure. This may be the reason for his second childhood dream—to become a pilot. Today, both of his childhood dreams are fully realised in his day job in the AED and his voluntary work with the GFS.

### The pursuit of excellence in the rush of the accident and emergency department

In 1997, Dr Chung joined the AED in QMH, and was instantly drawn to its detective work that requires one to think on one’s feet to save lives from the verge of death. In the AED, Dr Chung fully utilises his mental agility to integrate knowledge across specialties and his composure to make difficult decisions under pressure. He soon realised that his decisions as an emergency medicine doctor truly made a difference to the most severely and acutely ill patients. Befitting the momentous responsibilities of emergency medicine doctors, Dr Chung is dedicated to excellent health care through constant self-evaluation.

Beyond the emergency department, Dr Chung tracks his patients’ progress to check his diagnosis in the AED and sharpen his clinical acumen. He takes a considered approach to diagnosis through careful history taking and targeted physical examination for greater cost-effectiveness and most importantly, to save his patients the long wait and discomfort of multiple investigations. His patients’ increasingly favourable outcomes have been immensely fulfilling and fuelled his drive for self-improvement.

(left) Dr Chung aboard in his clinic in the air  
(right) Writing a message for a reader at the Hong Kong Book Fair

## Medic in the eye of the storm: life as an Air Medical Officer in the Government Flying Service

Dr Chung not only cares for his patients in the confines of the hospital, but also “brings the AED to the patient’s side”. In 2003, he combined his passion for medicine and flying by joining the second batch of Air MO at the GFS. Working with a small team of two pilots, two air crewmen and a nurse, each member punches above their weight, and Dr Chung is no exception. His duties in the GFS include search and rescue from an inshore location or offshore in the South China Sea, case evacuation for patients on outlying islands who require more intensive care, and roadside rescue for accident sites accessible only by helicopter. As only licensed doctors can prescribe medicine under Hong Kong law—often essential for the dying patient—Air MOs indeed make a vital contribution to a GFS operation.

The helicopter is extremely austere in contrast to the AED. The surrounding terrain and weather is likely perilous, manpower is limited and so is the on-board pharmacy and diagnostic equipment. Without the benefit of predictive diagnostics, the Air MO must simultaneously devise multiple detailed management plans respective to diverse diagnostic possibilities. The GFS stretches a doctor’s skills to the limits and constantly challenges one to surpass oneself. Consequently, Dr Chung’s experiences in the GFS enhance his clinical sense and enable him to make better decisions in his everyday practice.

A true advocate of lifelong learning, Dr Chung also participates in Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET) in Singapore once every 3 years, shown to increase helicopter passenger’s survival rate from 15% to 93% in emergency ditching situations.

Over the course of 13 years in the GFS, Dr Chung’s astute clinical sense has come to the pivotal aid of numerous patients in over 300 missions, around 30 of which have been critically ill. Dr Chung vividly remembers his rescue mission of an inebriated cyclist found unconscious after drowning in the mountains of Sai Kung. Upon arrival, the patient was in asystole and had a cervical spine injury, all of which were within Dr Chung’s expectations as a seasoned Air MO. He immediately performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation, intubation, and provided protection for the patient’s neck and spine and successfully resuscitated the patient with drugs. Doctors in GFS can utilise more resources than the regular emergency medical technician to greatly improve survival prospects.

## The poet of medicine: Sherlock Holmes of the emergency department

When Sherlock Holmes refuses to record and publish

the scintillating accounts of his adventures, John Watson endeavours to do so for him. Thankfully, Dr Chung himself is a lover of literature gifted in writing charismatic prose, who delights his substantial online and offline following with inspirational medical narratives. In fact, literature also serves as a source of inspiration for Dr Chung’s medical career. To him, the connection between writing and medicine is obvious: an author’s uncompromising attitude in perfecting his craft parallels the commitment to continuous self-improvement in a dedicated doctor.

Self-coined as “Sherlock Holmes of the AED”, Dr Chung explained that Holmes was not merely investigating crimes to make a living. Rather, he was deeply invested in his work, evident in the courage and persistence with which he established his celebrated career. It is impossible to appreciate Holmes’ knowledge, experience, and insight in isolation from his values and beliefs. Similarly, the doctor’s work is an expression of his inner beliefs about his career and life purpose, which has a direct bearing on the quality of care that he delivers.

Dr Chung’s staunch resolve and commitment to excellence has been paramount to his extensive accomplishments. He is a best-selling author of two books on anecdotes about his time in the AED as the “Sherlock Holmes of the AED” 《急症室的福爾摩斯》. His second book topped the Commercial Press bestsellers list for the entire 2016 Book Fair. Youths from all backgrounds, ranging from secondary schools, medical and nursing schools, to prehospital rescue teams, continuously send Dr Chung letters of appreciation for his encouragement to pursue their own passions and goals, and Dr Chung has even befriended many of his fans in real life. Veritably, Dr Chung’s words have touched the hearts of the masses for good, much like the beloved Sherlock Holmes novels.

## Patient advocacy through writing

While no doubt pleased with the warm reception for his books, it was neither the aim nor motivation for him to embark on a writing career. “I wrote primarily to promote the specialty to potential trainees and encourage a more responsible attitude in medical practice,” explained Dr Chung.

Realising the significant influence of the media on public viewpoint, Dr Chung also uses writing to increase interest in emergency medicine. As Dr Chung saw it, the specialty in Hong Kong is dangerously close to a watershed moment that may be followed by an irreversible decline.

“Junior doctors are uninterested in the specialty because of its exposure to high stress, difficult work, long working hours, and its limited career development opportunities in the private sector. Doctors in the AED are now easily more than 5 years apart in experience because of the poor retention

rate of trainees in the department, many of whom see the AED merely as a stopover to training in a more comfortable and lucrative specialty,” lamented Dr Chung.

Dr Chung noted that the unique skills required to manage a diverse array of medical emergencies—from poisonings to car accidents—make emergency medicine specialists indispensable. Therefore, to advocate for patient’s interests that are at stake, Dr Chung is compelled to write tirelessly about his passion for emergency medicine and the lives that it has touched.

### **Making a life by what he gives—dedication to community service**

His wide array of engagements certainly begs the question: how does Dr Chung find the energy to publish in addition to handling his heavy workload in the AED and the GFS? “Writing energises me,” said Dr Chung. “When you discover something that you are truly passionate about, it enriches your life. Even when I am writing in the darkness of the night or sacrificing my leisure time, it is not energy depleting but rather an experience of pure joy.”

Dr Chung also devotes his time to support various public education initiatives. He has been invited as a guest tutor in writing workshops such as the “Little Writer Training Program” organised by The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and Ming Pao. He has also been invited to present awards for writing competitions. He even returned as an alumnus to his high school on Valentine’s Day to share a novel called “The Story of Chasing Dreams”. On many occasions, he has shared one of his core beliefs which is also found in his writing: one must go the extra mile to realise one’s dreams.

In a massive paradox, freedom is seemingly at a historical low amidst the proliferation of material wealth nowadays. For busy doctors, time is a scarce commodity that sometimes undermines the quality of medical care and saps their motivation to contribute to health beyond their day job.

Dr Chung’s energetic and creative persona resounds with the message that freedom is a choice, not a given. For him, freedom comes from staying in touch with his passion and love for humanity and beauty—whether in the AED or the arts. His distinguishing character trait is his deep self-understanding and confidence to explore and seize opportunities that allow him to exhibit his exceptional talents and experiences.

To those who seek to chase the thrill of frontline medicine, or who feel a moral sense of duty to serve and protect in action, Dr Chung promises that opportunities are bountiful. Of note, GFS started recruiting new Air MOs in late February 2017 through the GFS website. This will definitely

be a great opportunity to serve the community by providing immediate professional and expeditious medical care to victims and casualties in the GFS.

Remarkably, Dr Chung is not only a writer or an aircrewman beneath the white coat. Instead, his alter egos are all integral parts of the same self, anchored by the one unifying principle that underlies his life’s work—one of responsibility, love, and commitment to excellence.



(top to bottom)  
Dr Chung in full gear in front of an EC155B1 helicopter; Dr Chung with a paediatric patient in the wilderness. Dr Chung with Caitlin (middle) and Natalie (right)