

DRIVING GROWTH IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY

by Genevieve Cua

WHEN Chin Wei Jia stepped into the Health Management International (HMI) Group, a healthcare management business established by her family, she did so with some trepidation. It was 2002, and armed with a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in international relations, she began as a management trainee doing mundane tasks like taking minutes at meetings and photocopying documents.

She had a big reservation. "Everyone knows I'm (the boss's) daughter. I thought it was a negative point. I believe everyone must be measured by his or her own merit."

Her keen desire to improve people's lives and to make a large impact in the shortest possible time convinced her that a career at HMI was the right fit. She has not looked back since.

HMI today is a respected name in healthcare. It runs two tertiary hospitals in Malaysia – the Mahkota Medical Centre and the Regency Specialist Hospital, both of which have expanded significantly over the years. In Singapore it operates the StarMed Specialist Centre, a one-stop ambulatory care centre that aims to provide top care at affordable prices. The group has also invested in a chain of GP clinics called OneCare Medical Group.

But what gives Ms Chin, who rose to become chief executive in 2015, the greatest satisfaction is the social mission of HMI which underlies all its activities. Business success and helping people are not mutually exclusive goals – for HMI they are intertwined.

"We need to be profitable so we can reinvest in facilities and in people to give them a rewarding career. I don't believe social and business objectives are different. Healthcare is a business but it's also a public good. As we grow, we're aware that we have resources in the form of medical and healthcare knowledge and equipment. How can we be a good partner to the community that we take care of? In everything, we think of people first – one person at a time. You just need one person to make a difference."

THE HMI Group was founded in 1998 and listed on the SGX Mainboard in 1999. Last year, it was delisted following a joint bid with a private equity fund managed by EQT Partners to take it private. It is hoped that post-privatisation, it is able to pursue expansion in a more expedient fashion. "We want to be a very Asian company. Our focus is to look at opportunities in South-east Asia. With our new structure we hope we can be more nimble and agile."

In a statement in January, Brian Chang, partner at EQT Partners, said the firm was excited to support HMI in its growth journey. "Going forward, the joint focus will be on scaling HMI's operations in the region with its differentiated, passionate and hands-on approach while continuing to deliver high quality healthcare to its customers." Through it all, the social ethos that has driven HMI remains unchanged. Ms Chin describes the group's core values in terms of the "three C's". These are compassion, competence and collaboration.

"We treat everyone as we do our family member. For competence, we need to know our job to deliver the best care. And, we need to collaborate with partners and the greater community... As one entity we can build and strengthen relationships."

Partners include university hospitals and healthcare professionals such as doctors. She defines HMI's target segment as the middle to upper middle income consumers who want quality healthcare at affordable prices. "Across Asia we see very big growth in the middle income population, and increasing demand for private healthcare. Our business model caters for this."

For instance, facilities are designed to cater for volume, and to be comfortable, albeit not at the level of "five-star hotel finishing".

"We invest in medical technology which has a direct impact on patient care, diagnostics and treatment. When we have volume we can continuously invest in medical technology. We offer good service

Chin Wei Jia, Group CEO of Health Management International, believes that business success and helping people are not mutually exclusive goals



PHOTO: KELVIN CHAI

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Chin Wei Jia (above), Group CEO of Health Management International



BEING INCLUSIVE

- 1) StarMed Specialist Centre to provide top care at affordable prices
- 2) About 10,000 participants took part in the mass CPR event
- 3) StarMed Specialist Centre enables patients to obtain procedures on an outpatient basis
- 4) MMC Building
- 5) Healthcare professional sharing a light-hearted moment with a patient

"Studies on successful family businesses find that businesses with a purpose are able to grow profits sustainably. HMI balances business profitability with the social objective of delivering quality healthcare at affordable prices. HMI's vocational lifelong learning institute is a social enterprise to help mature Singaporeans acquire new skills for healthcare jobs. We encourage more business families to develop and grow such meaningful initiatives, leverage their core strengths and engage stakeholders in the larger community to drive impactful and positive change."

BFI@SMU

This column profiles business families and how they approach issues of governance and stewardship. They support the Business Families Institute's mission. SMU established BFI in 2012, in response to the growing needs of business families in Asia. It encourages business families to Think Generations, Think Growth, Think Giving and Think Global.

es but not at a high price point. The volume averages down the overall costs... We don't have a price leader strategy. We should be at or below market in costs. That differential is the value we offer. This point is extremely important."

STARMED Specialist Centre is an example of how HMI delivers value. As an ambulatory care centre, it enables patients to obtain procedures such as diagnostics and surgery on an outpatient basis. Ms Chin said its business model reduces costs in two ways. One is in terms of the efficient use of space which reduces real estate cost. Second is that not all departments are run on a 24-hour basis, which also reduces overheads.

The group's social values and mission are reflected in the HMI Institute of Health Sciences which provides healthcare training to those who aspire to make a career switch into healthcare as well as private individuals who may be caregivers in their families. Since 2009, the HMI Institute has been a SkillsFuture Singapore-appointed Continuing Education and Training Centre for the healthcare support sector, and it has trained over 5,000 graduates for the healthcare industry since 2001.

Last year, it was registered as a social enterprise, which is defined as a business which may seek to maximise profit but also seeks to deliver maximum benefits to society.

A social enterprise status "makes it very clear what we do and why", says Ms Chin. "We felt we wanted to be very clear in our positioning. It helps us to define how we aim to reach our target beneficiaries."

HMI Institute's courses comprise workforce skills qualifications which may be obtained on a certificate or modular levels. It also offers a professional healthcare programme for healthcare management, designed to equip participants with leadership skills, among others, in the healthcare sector. It also offers community care training, and training in emergency life support, including cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator.

LAST year, it made the Malaysia Book of Records for the largest participation in mass CPR event, with over 10,000 participants in a joint event hosted by Mahkota and Regency. Even more gratifying was that a participant managed to apply CPR to help save the life of someone at the KL airport two weeks after the event. Says Ms Chin: "That's why we do these things. I can't measure the numbers but we look at real impact."

HMI Institute also offers a programme to build resilience among healthcare workers. For the community it is developing a "care portal", "to target non-professional caregivers, usually a family member or helper, who is thrust into the position of caring for someone but may not know how".

The HMI Group now has a total staff strength of about 2,000. Fewer than a handful are members of the founding family. Gan See Khem, HMI executive chairman and managing director, is Ms Chia's mother. Her brother Chin Wei Yao is executive director and chief investment officer.

Ms Chin says appointments are by merit. "We look at every position and individual objectively. My parents always gave us a choice; none of us were forced into the business. It's very different from feeling entitled or feeling that you didn't have a choice."

"If someone (in the family) wants a certain spot, he or she must have the qualifications or experience. Mutual respect among family members is important. We have clear roles for everyone. Even performance reviews are done by independent parties. I don't review a family member; it's done by the board or other management."

She says she is open to a non-family professional taking over the helm of HMI. "Of course! I will look at the top management. The leader must believe in the vision and values of the company... We look at qualifications and experience, and you need to be a people developer."

"Our focus has always been how do we build people up – it's even better if they are better than me. I'd be excited to bring them in. Everyone must have the assurance that the leader is driving growth in a sustainable way with people at the core."