

The SMA Charity Fund

By Prof Wong Tien Yin

The tradition of giving

As doctors, we have been very privileged. We have a tremendous tradition, outstanding and long-serving teachers, and patients and families who entrust their healthcare to us. We would want to give back to society and future generations, as well as maintain a tradition of giving in future medical students.

In 2007, SMA, in joint collaboration with the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM) and with the support of the NUS Development Office, started the SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund to support the living expenses of needy students during the course of their medical education at YLLSoM. Since its inception, the fund has received more than \$1 million worth of donations from SMA members and their friends from both the medical and nonmedical sectors. To date, \$330,000 has been disbursed to 85 YLLSoM students.

With the establishment of the second and third medical schools (Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine), SMA saw a need to extend the Medical Students' Assistance Fund to benefit needy students from these two new medical schools as well. To this end, a separate entity, the SMA Charity Fund (SMACF), was set up on 25 February 2013, thus allowing SMA to serve not only the aforementioned purpose. We also identified new areas of need in society, including the following:

1. Public education on specific health topics, including Ophthalmology, Geriatrics and Mental Health, through SMA's annual National Medical Conventions;
2. Partnership with the NUS YLLSoM Medical Society in its annual health screening projects, which helps 2,000 beneficiaries per year;
3. Collaboration with the NUS YLLSoM Medical Society and Wong Hock Boon Society to establish medical research and mentorship awards;

4. Provision of free advertising space in SMA's monthly newsletter, *SMA News* for societal groups, charities and voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) to promote volunteerism among its members and target audience; and
5. Distribution of print materials and allocation of booth spaces for charitable projects (such as Camp Simba) at SMA-run events, to reach out to potential donors and volunteers.

SMACF's establishment marks a new milestone in SMA's history, bringing together SMA's current charitable initiatives and its goals of meeting the greater needs of the larger society under one giant umbrella, managed by an independent and diverse board of directors.

Our drive

SMACF seeks to utilise SMA's strengths to meet a range of current needs, including, but not limited to, the following areas:

1. Financial needs

- **Gap:** financial assistance to needy students is mostly school-specific or alumni-based, and the funds are not directly disbursed to students but offset against the tuition fees payable to the institution.
- **Aim:** SMACF seeks to provide exceptional individuals from needy families an equal opportunity to pursue a medical education by offering financial assistance for their basic living expenses.
- **Role:** SMACF will work with medical schools and their student bodies to determine the appropriate quantum of funding and leverage their current systems to identify potential beneficiaries. The funds will be fully disbursed to students and not offset against tuition fees, so that the basic living expenses of these students and their families can be met.

Photo: Shutterstock

- **Expected outcome:** needy medical students will receive funding for basic living expenses so that they can focus on their medical studies.

2. Volunteerism

- **Gap:** opportunities for volunteerism among the medical profession abound. However, the platforms for engaging volunteers are either limited or ineffective, resulting in undertargeting of the wealth of professional expertise available in Singapore.
- **Aim:** our goal is to engage both doctors and medical students by making opportunities for volunteerism readily accessible and available.
- **Role:** SMACF acts as a bridge to narrow the gap between the medical sector and societal groups/VWOs, giving doctors and medical students access to opportunities to make positive contributions to the less fortunate in society.
- **Expected outcome:** greater awareness of the different platforms for volunteerism will be created among members of society/societal groups/VWOs and the medical profession.

3. Mentorship

- **Gap:** although mentorship of young researchers is crucial to the development of groundbreaking research, there is often a lack of recognition of mentor-mentee relationships within the medical profession.
- **Aim:** to advance the quality of healthcare, SMACF seeks to encourage active mentorship in public health projects that are geared towards improving health outcomes.
- **Role:** SMACF will actively collaborate with organisations and medical schools to develop awards in recognition of outstanding mentors and researchers, with a special focus on research with significant contributions to public health.
- **Expected outcome:** an increased interest in research work among medical students and an active, vibrant environment for young researchers to thrive under the mentorship of experienced researchers.

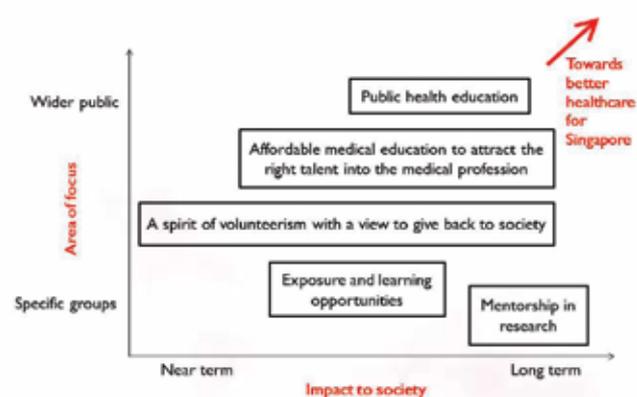
4. Learning exposure

- **Gap:** due to financial constraints, needy medical students often miss opportunities for learning through overseas exposures and local conferences.
- **Aim:** we seek to enable needy medical students to pursue learning opportunities outside the classroom as such exposures are crucial to their advancement. It is our belief that no student should be deprived of such opportunities due to a lack of funds.

- **Role:** for a start, SMACF will provide financial support to a limited number of needy medical students who wish to attend local or overseas conferences, seminars, workshops or electives that would enhance their current medical knowledge and skills. In time, we are targeting to grow the available funds to benefit a larger number of beneficiaries.
- **Expected outcome:** through SMACF's support, needy students will have equal opportunities to gain valuable learning experiences through local and overseas programmes.

Our vision

Vision: Towards better healthcare for Singapore



Our team

It is our belief that a strong and experienced board of directors will best serve the objectives and interests of SMACF. Our Board of Directors comprises individuals from diverse professional backgrounds, who possess both immense experience in governing charities and a keen interest in healthcare and medical education. The heterogeneity of the Board allows for robust discussion and a diversity of ideas, which would further advance the objectives and interests of SMACF.

SMACF has appointed **Dr Charles Toh Chai Soon** as Special Advisor to its Board of Directors. Dr Toh's years of experience in charities and public service would provide immeasurable guidance to the board during the initial stages of SMACF's set-up.

The SMA Secretariat will provide administrative support to SMACF in the initial stages of the start-up, as part of SMA's commitment to support SMACF, as well as to manage the cost of the start-up.

SMACF's Special Advisor and 1st Board of Directors



Dr Charles Toh Chai Soon
Special Advisor



Prof Wong Tien Yin
Chairperson



Mr Lim Fung Wan, Colin
Board Member



Mr Sitoh Yih Pin
Board Member



A/Prof Tan Sze Wee
Board Member



Prof Thio Li-Ann
Board Member



Mr T K Udairam
Board Member



Dr Wong Chiang Yin
Board Member

Our call

We cannot embark on this journey alone, but together as a united profession, we can impact the future. Your support for the SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund has been overwhelming since its inception, and we would like to call on your continued support for SMACF and its activities.

SMACF has been a registered charity under the Charities Act (Cap 37) since 17 April 2013. It is our aim

to apply for Institution of Public Character status in 2014 so that our donors can receive tax deduction benefits. SMACF will continue to update you on the status of this application.

In the meantime, we have been promoting volunteering opportunities through *SMA News* and the SMA website (<http://www.sma.org.sg/smacares>), and we hope that these opportunities will allow you to make positive contributions to the less fortunate in society. **SMA**