

# Professional Development for Everyone

In this President's Forum, I am focusing on a pro-active activity of the SMA. This is the promotion of professional development in each of us.

## IPPG-SMA SEMINAR

The IPPG-SMA Seminar is reported in this issue of the News. It was a seminar that was thought provoking. As I said in my opening address, it was a three-in-one event: the opportunity for SMA to host the inter-professional activity of the IPPG (acronym for Inter-professional presidents' Group), the "foundation laying" of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (CMEP) and the soft launch of the CMEP website.

Prof SY Tan, the keynote speaker, identified three key attributes of medical professionalism which I found can be remembered with the acronym of ACE: Altruism, Competence and Ethical behaviour. These three attributes are equally applicable to other professions as well. In the panel discussion contributed by a speaker from each of the six professions that followed, the

characteristics and the problems of professionalism in Singapore was further examined. A brief report of this discussion is included in the lead article. The take home message the participants gave me personally is this: more than ever, professionalism needs to be ensured in the twenty-first century.

More than ever, the rush of the waves of entrepreneurship, mercantilism and consumerism are threatening to tear the fabric upon which professionalism is woven. Already, many in the professions have negative feelings. Altruism becomes meaningless to many under siege. Competence appears to be a meaningless struggle when the attraction to compromise becomes too overpowering. Ethical behaviour becomes a mockery. We need to replace these powerless feelings with positive and empowering ones.

By qualifying and choosing to practise as an accountant, engineer, lawyer, surveyor and valuer, architect, and doctor, each of us has chosen to become a professional. By the same token, we have a responsibility to keep the values of ACE in us alive.

## FOR THE PUBLIC

More than ever, it is important for the professions to highlight and showcase to the user, the values of a true professional, why a limit needs to be placed on mercantilism for the sake of the safety and interest of the end user, the responsibility of the profession and values of the profession concerned. Government too needs to recognise this because it is the leader of public values.

One example stood out in the IPPG-SMA seminar to illustrate the situation. The "design and build" idea may be great as a commercial idea. In it however, lies the danger that the safety of the end user may be compromised and professionalism

will be difficult to be assured under such circumstances. There appears a need for a rethink beyond mercantilism.

The idea of the Professional Award of the Year for architects, doctors, engineers, surveyors, lawyers, and accountants which was suggested by Mr Richard Ho, one of the panel speakers, to showcase the characteristics and values of professionalism to the public and the profession is a good one. Perhaps, IPPG may wish to take it up further.

## FOR US

This brings me to the point of a professional development programme for everyone that was implicit from the IPPG-SMA Seminar. SMA has agreed in the SMA CME Co-ordinating Committee's deliberations to take care of the CME needs of the medical profession on matters of medical ethics, professionalism, practice and medical laws. The website is the starting point. In it we will accumulate the gems of the four topics. There will be internet links to selected articles from other sites across the globe. For example, the link to the National Guideline Clearinghouse gives the surfer access to the pandorama of the 700 chosen clinical guidelines at several clicks of the mouse. These will be a boon to those looking for what standards of practice to set in the search for medical excellence.

Obviously the interest to the four topics of medical ethics, professionalism, practice and medical laws will vary from individual to individual. We hope to be able to cater to the interests of everyone. As we build our archive of useful articles, we hope you will take the trouble to indicate to us in CMEP, any article in your reading that you feel is a gem to be shared with fellow colleagues. Thank you.

The website is but one path to professionalism. CMEP is more than a virtual centre. It will also be planning

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activities like professional development programmes for everyone. The centre has thus identified two activities in the coming year.

The first is the CME sessions in the areas of medical ethics and professionalism, practice, and medical laws that will be run monthly, about 9 to 10 times a year for each area. These will be case based. Potentially, there are therefore 30 topics for the Singapore doctors to choose from. Each topic will have CME points but that is not the main reason for running the sessions.

The second is the burst of activities scheduled from 1-5 November. There will be four items: a short course on medical negligence; a Saturday afternoon session on practice management; a Sunday morning mini-course on the ethics on the relationship of the doctor with his professional world; and the SMA lecture in the afternoon as the grand finale.

Think about your professional development programme just as you would think of developing your clinical skills through a structured programme. ■

# Quotable Quotes

from SMA-IPPG Seminar keynote address, "Medical Professionalism: Our Badge and Our Pledge"

- *"The policeman wears a badge that warns the criminal he's there to protect society; the doctor wears one that pledges to society the protection of its health."*
- *"...the Center is making a simple and uncompromising statement that the patient will always come first."*
- *"Elements of professionalism may be simplified into the big 3: altruism, excellence, and ethics...I suspect that much of altruism is learnt early in life through the positive influence of parents, teachers, religious leaders and good friends. By the time the student enters medical school, it is probably too late."*
- *"If we wish to have doctors who treat their work as a calling rather than a trade, then medical school admission committees ought to look more closely for evidence of altruistic behaviour in the applicant...We seek a servant's heart and the motivation to serve."*
- *"Motivation is not exactly the same as incentive. Motivation comes from within, an innate drive. It is a humane value, whereas incentives are social constructs or individually valued rewards for desired behaviour."*
- *"Life-long learning in order to keep at Medicine's cutting edge is expected of all of us – generalists and specialists alike. But how many doctors do keep up? "*
- *"The medical profession is under siege. The public increasingly distrusts us because we are too condescending to listen, too mediocre to keep up, and too greedy to truly care about their welfare."*
- *"Once upon a time, there was an empathic, scholarly, humanist named Doc, but as he grew popular and successful, he began to trade in his badge of service. His descent was gradual, barely perceptible, but nonetheless real. Finally, he found himself transformed into an arrogant, incompetent and materialistic three-headed god. This describes some of us, but many more of our colleagues are falling."*
- *"Now is the time to again wear that badge with humility, and renew our pledge to society."*