

9th SMA House Officers' Seminar

By Dr Alfred Kow, Vice Chairman, Organising Committee

This year's House Officers' (HO) Seminar was organised by the SMA, on 26 April 2003, at The Ballroom, Conrad Centennial Singapore. The main sponsor this year was the Medical Protection Society (MPS).

Dr Foo Chuan Kit, Chairman of the Organising Committee, and Dr Alfred Kow worked out the programme and manpower issues, while SMA helped to source for sponsors and the venue.

In view of the SARS outbreak, SMA had taken several precautionary measures for the seminar. This was to set an example as to how healthcare workers adapted life to SARS, and at the same time, allow important meetings to continue. Indeed, the HO Seminars can provide important insights to new HOs. As such, past and recent seminars have always been extremely well-attended, even though attendance was not compulsory.

On the day itself, health declaration and temperature checks were conducted before participants were allowed into the Ballroom. HOs were also provided with a sticker stating their respective postings and temperature, as well as a surgical mask that they had to wear. Everyone was seated at a distance from each other, and also advised to avoid mingling, so as to reduce close contact.

Dr Wong Chiang Yin, 1st Vice President of SMA, started the ball rolling by giving the Opening Address. (See page 16 for the Opening Address.)

This was followed by a minute of silence, to pay respects to the healthcare workers who had perished in the war against SARS: Dr Ong Hok Su and Dr Alex Chao.

The talks started with Dr Lee Ruixiong's talk on ward rounds and his personal experiences. He highlighted that there was always something to do during the ward round, and HOs should be proactive in the process. If the consultant of the team was examining the patient, then the HO should try to document the findings. If someone was already writing, then the HO could help by taking blood pressure.

Dr Endean Tan addressed the audience on doing "changes". HOs must be able to prioritise their work, and settle the most urgent matters before proceeding to do the rest. Efficiency during housemanship was also an essential virtue as it determined the standard of practice, and the time available to have meals and rest.

Dr Harvey Chim spoke on clerking new cases. He urged the new HOs to learn how to determine which cases were more urgent and therefore required immediate attention. He also explained the various types of cases, such as "cold" cases from clinics, elective cases, and "hot" A&E admissions. Although there are different clerking styles in different specialties, important things like drug allergies and background of medical problems should not be missed.

Dr Timothy Shim shared with the new HOs that night calls were fun, but could also be tough. Thus, they should be mentally prepared. The first few night calls could be terrible, but they would soon adapt to the situation. Again, prioritisation during night calls was important as it determined the amount of rest available. He advised the audience to work hard, and play hard as well.

The speakers and audience then adjourned for lunch. As another precautionary measure to reduce close personal contact, lunch boxes were provided by the hotel in place of a buffet lunch. Participants took turns to collect their lunch boxes and then returned to their respective seats to enjoy the meal.

In the meantime, Dr Lee Pheng Soon, President of SMA, addressed HOs regarding the role of SMA and MPS. He emphasised the importance of junior doctors getting adequate medical malpractice insurance coverage. He then illustrated the roles of SMA and strongly encouraged the new HOs to sign up as members. He explained that it was only with a strong representation of doctors in Singapore that SMA could

fight for their welfare, and present their views to the respective authorities. Dr Lee added that SMA is a voluntary organisation.

A short talk was then given by Mr Philip Peters, an insurance agent from AIA, who explained the roles of insurance specifically related to doctors. He also addressed medical coverage and various complications in claim procedures.

After the lunch break, Dr Yeo Wee Tiong shared his personal ideology on being a good colleague. He reminded the audience that colleagues are not only fellow doctors, but also include nursing and paramedical staff, and other hospital personnel. Dr Yeo also stressed the importance of creating a pleasant working environment for everybody so that morale would be high and work could be done in a more efficient manner.

A/Prof Rajasoorya, Chairman of the Medical Board of Alexandra Hospital, gave the final presentation of the day, speaking on qualities that were required to make a good HO, as well as the assessment criteria and career prospects.

The presentation on "Medical Indemnity" was circulated to HOs as handouts.

The seminar ended with a 30-min Q&A Session, during which HOs expressed their concern about various issues and were given reassurance by the panel of speakers.

Finally, the Organising Committee wishes to express its appreciation and gratitude to the MPS, SMA, as well as the following speakers and helpers who have helped to make this year's HO Seminar a success: A/Prof Rajasoorya, Dr Iain Tan Bee Huat, Dr Timothy Shim, Dr Lee Ruixiong, Dr Endean Tan, Dr Harvey Chim, Dr Yeo Wee Tiong, Dr Jason Chan, Dr Winnie Lam, Dr Yuen Siu Mun, Dr Chow Weien, Dr Ang Chia Chun, Dr Goh Jia Jun, Dr Nyo Yoke Lin, Dr Yee Choon Meng, Dr Kelvin Phua, Dr Chen Ching Kit, Dr Alice Lee, Dr Jessie Tan, Dr Jackson Lim and Dr Tan Ker Kan. ■

HO Seminar Opening Address

Editorial note:

The Opening Address by Dr Wong Chiang Yin, 1st Vice President, SMA, at the 9th SMA House Officers' Seminar on 26 April 2003, is reproduced below.

Dear Colleagues

This is the third year I am speaking on this occasion. Beginning housemanship is usually a time of great happiness and anticipation. This seminar is a passing of age rite, which we have organised for many years. I organised the first one with my friends in 1996, I believe in the Medical Alumni Auditorium. We have upgraded it since to hotels and your "goodie bags" are well-stocked with many useful things.

But this year, it is different, as you all know.

I will just deal with 3 things. The first is **discipline**. Some say SARS is an invisible enemy that kills. I like to look at it from another angle: SARS demands perfect discipline. You are not like us. You are still fresh and you have not picked up bad habits like us. So, for your own sake, your family's sake, do not pick up bad infection control habits. You will be perfectly disciplined and fastidious in your infection control habits. You will wear your masks at all times. Equally important, you will wear it correctly, and you will take it off correctly. The same methodical perfection applies to your goggles, gowns and hand-washing. You will NOT rush from patient to patient, and you will take your time even if the pager has rung for the twentieth time. Discipline is the first pre-requisite, without which, you cannot even begin to tackle the second issue, which is fear.

It is normal to be fearful. But you will learn to **control fear** and cope with it. All those wonderful things you had said in the Medicine Interviews in NUS 5 years ago about medicine being a calling – now is the time to make good what you said. I tell my mother the same thing. Since you chose medicine, you would have psychologically prepared for such a moment. That is why medicine is a calling, and not a job. I also walk the wards, A&E, et cetera, and I am exposed to risks. But that is part of the job.

Finally, after you have learnt to cope with your fear, you have to **keep up morale** – your very important role in all this as incoming housemen. We have been at this for more than a month. You are the first reinforcements, fresh faces that we have received in a long time. You bring capability, continuity, and above all, hope. You must not break. All the nurses and admin support staff have worked their butts off and then, beyond that. They look up to doctors to set the pace. If we crack, everyone down the line cracks. We must bear up. But we will give you the protection, psychological support, and the rest you need.

Forgive me for being somber today. Some of you would have been taught by Dr Alex Chao who passed away this Tuesday, probably from SARS. He was my cousin, and we had good times together. He would have wanted me to say this to all of you.

With that, I would like to welcome you formally to the medical profession in its darkest moment. But I am confident it is also our finest hour, as long as we have discipline, control our fear, and uphold morale.

Thank you. ■