

News from SMA Council

I. PATIENT SAFETY & NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS

SMA was recently invited by the press to comment on a spate of articles about medical procedures. For the information of members, we reproduce here the full text of our response.

“With respect to Dr Martin Huang’s letter published in *The Business Times* on 15 December 2006 and his reference to non-disclosure agreements, the SMA would like to highlight that a fundamental component of any doctor-patient communication is the provision of accurate and relevant information on the patient’s medical condition and available treatment. When advocating a specific modality of treatment, it is the doctor’s professional obligation to state the benefits and risks of a procedure or drug, and this certainly includes known complication rates based on information available to date. In respecting patient autonomy, the provision of such material information is both a legal and ethical requirement for the process of informed consent, and will help to enhance compliance to the proposed treatment plan and ultimately to promote patient safety. This is clearly articulated in paragraph 4.2.2 of the Singapore Medical Council’s Ethical Code which states that:

“It is a doctor’s responsibility to ensure that a patient under his care is adequately informed about his medical condition and options for treatment so that he is able to participate in decisions about his treatment.

If a procedure needs to be performed, the patient shall be made aware of the benefits, risks, and possible complications of the procedure and any alternatives available to him.”

In addition, the Singapore Medical Association is also supportive of further enhancing patient safety through regular and ad hoc clinical audits, especially for medical interventions that are new. Such reviews of a procedure’s effectiveness and safety is usually carried out by the doctor, the clinic, the medical institution or by the Ministry of Health, as empowered by our statute (Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act).

In the interest of patient safety, the SMA therefore cautions doctors against contractual

agreements that may prohibit them from revealing known complication rates of a clinical procedure to patients or the sharing of such data in formal clinical review processes, so that their ethical obligations to their patients are not unduly compromised.”

2. ADOPTING IT FOR BETTER CONTINUITY OF CARE

The Ministry of Health has recently formed the **Advisory Committee for IT Integration for Continuity of Care** to look into leveraging on IT to achieve the objective of a better integrated healthcare delivery system.

The committee’s terms of reference are as follows:

- (a) To advise MOH on IT integration for the purpose of continuity of care across hospitals, primary, intermediate and long-term care facilities in order to bring about holistic, family-physician-centred care and right-siting of care in community.
- (b) To engage relevant stakeholders through focus groups, feedback sessions or other routes in order to gather representative views to bring about seamless IT integration.
- (c) To advise on strategies to encourage IT-adoption to enhance continuity of care amongst healthcare professionals.

As part of the consultation, the committee will reach out to other representatives from the primary care, step-down care or VWO communities through focus group discussions or feedback sessions to seek their views.

To reflect the role played by SMA in the right-siting of care, MOH appointed SMA Council Member **Dr Wong Tien Hua** as a member of the committee. Dr Wong’s 3-year appointment begins on 1 February 2007.

3. DIALOGUE WITH SMA MEMBERS

The dialogue scheduled on 16 January 2007 was cancelled as less than five members had signed up. No more sessions are scheduled for the remaining term of the 47th SMA Council.

We continue to welcome members’ feedback and queries by the usual channels: mail, fax 6224 7827 or email sma@sma.org.sg.

4. FREE DRUG FORMULARY



The second 2006 edition of **MEDI-BANK** was sent out in late December. This drug formulary is distributed free to all members under a collaboration with the publisher Vital Base Co Pte Ltd. Members who did not receive their copy can contact Vital Base at telephone **6294 0113**.

5. IN MEMORY OF GARFIELD

The late Dr Chan Kah Poon (29 October 1943 – 21 February 2005), who went by the pen name of *Garfield*, was one of our most prolific writers as well as an Editorial Board Member. He wrote a total of 88 articles from 1986 to 2004 in *SMA News*.

We hope to put together a commemorative book containing some of these writings, as well as commentaries by friends and colleagues, to record the evolving historical tapestry of healthcare in Singapore as seen through the eyes of *Garfield*.

We are currently looking for sponsorship to publish this book. Members who are interested can contact the SMA Secretariat for more information.

6. LIFE MEMBERSHIP

We would like to draw members' attention to Article III, Section (i) of the SMA Constitution:

“Life membership may be granted to:

- a. *Ordinary Members who have been in continuous membership for at least five years, who have reached the age of 55 years and who have retired from active professional practice in Singapore; &*
- b. *Ordinary Members who have been in continuous membership for at least twenty years, on payment of a sum equivalent to ten years' annual subscription at Ordinary rate.”*

Members who qualify under any of the above categories can submit their applications to SMA.

Members may also wish to note that SMA will be putting up a proposal at the upcoming AGM on **1 April 2007 (Sunday)**, to offer Life Membership as well to those who have been in continuous membership for 30 years without further payment of subscriptions.

In order to amend the SMA Constitution to include the above, we require a quorum of 50 members at the AGM to vote on the proposed amendment.

As such, we urge members to attend the AGM to vote in favour of the proposed amendment. Please also encourage your fellow doctors who are members to attend the AGM to lend their support. If the motion is passed, those who have been in continuous membership for 30 years will automatically be granted Life Membership without further payment of subscriptions. ■

NOTICE OF 47TH SMA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1 April 2007 (Sunday), 2 pm, Alumni Auditorium

1. **Resolutions and proposed constitution amendments** should be made in writing and reach the Honorary Secretary by 12 noon on Thursday, 1 March 2007 at the latest.
2. **Nominations of candidates** (using the prescribed nomination form) to fill the 8 vacancies in the Council must be signed by 2 Ordinary/Life Members and contain a consent to act, if elected, signed by the person nominated and must reach the Honorary Secretary by 12 noon on Thursday, 1 March 2007 at the latest.

Please contact the SMA Secretariat at Tel: 6223 1264 or email sma@sma.org.sg for the nomination forms and more details.