

PRESIDENT'S Welcome Address



Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

Senior Minister and Mrs Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Honorary Members, honoured guests, fellow members, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome all of you to SMA's 60th Anniversary Dinner. I am Lee Yik Voon, your SMA President. I am very glad that so many of you have taken precious time from your busy schedules to be with us this evening to celebrate our 60th anniversary.

From the days of the Straits Medical Association, which later became a branch of the British Medical Association, two Medical associations were born. First, our SMA on 15 September 1959 and then, the Malaysian Medical Association on 24 October 1959.

Through the years, SMA has achieved many milestones:

- ▶ The inaugural issue of the *Singapore Medical Journal* was published in March 1960. We achieved an impact factor of 1.08 last year, higher than any local medical journal.
- ▶ *SMA Newsletter*, now known as *SMA News*, was first published in 1966 to communicate medical news, events and interesting trivia.
- ▶ The Annual SMA Lecture was instituted in 1963. Dr Gwee Ah Leng delivered the first lecture, titled "Advertisement and the Medical Profession".
- ▶ Our first National Medical Convention was held at Singapore Trade Union

Congress Hall in 1968 and addressed two themes – occupational health and cancer.

- ▶ There have been many debates and dialogues with the Ministry of Health (MOH) over the years, of which one of the first was on dispensing. SMA won the debate and hence right now, clinics are still allowed to dispense medications. Other dialogues included the labelling of medicine, and the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act, as we are MOH's trusted partner to reflect various concerns from the ground.
- ▶ In 1969, we saw the institution of the SMA Honorary Membership. Over the years, this honour has been bestowed on well-known leaders like Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Goh Chok Tong and our current Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong. Tonight, another leader will receive this honour.
- ▶ The first volunteer group of 14 Singapore Armed Forces medical officers was formed in 1970, led by Dr Arthur Lim, the then-President of SMA.
- ▶ We created Medik Awas in 1970 so that patients who are allergic to Penicillin and other medications, and those with diabetes, could be easily identified through their identification card and tag when they see their doctors or when they are found unconscious.
- ▶ In 1972, SMA visited the Chinese Medical Association for the first time and received a red carpet welcome. We reciprocated in the later part of that year.
- ▶ The Guideline on Fees was started upon the request of the MOH in 1987, but it was withdrawn in 2007 as it may be deemed anti-competitive. It was reinstated in November 2018 as a fee benchmark and our veteran, Dr Toh Choon Lai, was invited to be part of the MOH workgroup. SMA supported the fee benchmark and with that, proposed to do away with many medical claims restrictions while simplifying and speeding up the medical claims process.
- ▶ The formation of MASEAN, short for Medical Association of South East Asian Nations, was in 1980 and the MASEAN secretariat was moved to Singapore in 1996. I am the current MASEAN secretary general.
- ▶ The SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (SMA CMEP) was set up in 2000 to provide doctors with a platform for lifelong learning in the areas of medical ethics, professionalism and health law. The SMA CMEP also hopes to provide leadership in areas of academic training, discussions and research, to support a high standard of medical professionalism, in addition to

developing and promoting the art and science of medical ethics and medical care for the betterment of patient care and public health.

- ▶ During the SARS pandemic, SMA acquired N95 masks from SingHealth and distributed them to our community GPs.
- ▶ Together with the National Healthcare Group, SingHealth, Singapore Nurses Association and Singapore Press Holdings, SMA set up the Courage Fund after the SARS pandemic.
- ▶ In 2009, SMA partnered with MOH to supply Personal Protection Equipment to Community GPs during the H1N1 pandemic.
- ▶ We conducted numerous managed care surveys (since 2003) and had our Medical Convention on Managed Care in 2006. We produced an advisory on managed care organisations in 2009, and with the other two sister professional bodies (Academy of Medicine, Singapore [AMS] and College of Family Physicians Singapore [CFPS]), SMA produced a AMS-CFPS-SMA Joint Advisory on Fees Paid to Managed Care and Third-Party Administrator Companies in 2017.
- ▶ The SMA Medical Students' Assistance Fund was set up in 2007 and this led to the incorporation of the SMA Charity Fund in 2013.

- ▶ SMA Doctors in Training Committee, previously known as the Young Doctors Sub-Committee, was formed to provide strong representation of junior doctors and the issues they face in their residency years.
- ▶ The Singapore Medical Week was launched in August 2017, together with the SMA eMarket, an e-procurement platform for medical devices and consumables. The inaugural SMA National Medical Students' Convention was held in the same week with participation of medical students from the three local medical schools.
- ▶ Concerned with patients' privacy and confidentiality in the implementation of compulsory contribution by various medical facilities, hospitals, specialist and GP clinics, nursing homes, etc, SMA partnered with the AMS and CFPS to conduct a public survey on the National Electronic Health Record which produced results confirming our members' concerns.
- ▶ We organised a symposium in April 2018 titled "Embracing a Safe Digital Health Future for Singapore" to address telemedicine. The areas of concern included regulatory measures, ensuring quality care and compromise in the standards of care, patient safety, and ethics behind providing virtual care.

- ▶ SMA is also involved in the MOH workgroup appointed to review the taking of informed consent and the Singapore Medical Council disciplinary procedure. There is no sacred cow, and we will take the root and branch approach to make the necessary changes. However, there has to be a balance between interest of the doctors and the public.

SMA is constantly looking at how to better serve our Members and society. With new media, modern information technology initiatives and our goal of being a smart nation, we hope to enable our medical profession to provide the care needed in the next century.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of SMA, there is much we need to keep abreast with so that we remain relevant to continue to lead, integrate, facilitate and empower doctors in their mission to serve the healthcare needs of our people, towards a better tomorrow. ◆

Legend

1. The 60th SMA Council with Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, past SMA Presidents, Honorary Members and distinguished guests

