


Editorial Board

E. K. Koh
Lim Siew Ming
K. K. Tan

Business Manager

Y. H. Liok

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The Second Medical Convention—Why You Should Not Miss

EDITORIAL

The Doctor in a National Emergency

The recent crisis both in Singapore and Malaysia should provide some hard thinking for those who are responsible for the maintenance of the medical services in the times of a national emergency. The medical services in Singapore fortunately were not called upon to perform yeoman tasks which were required of our Malaysian colleagues, but if it had been necessary there would be little doubt that the profession would once again rise to the occasion.

It is gratifying to note that there has been much co-operation between the various sectors of the profession in the hour of need. In Malaysia both the private and government sectors co-operated to bring speedy relief to the unfortunate riot victims. In Singapore too, members of the Society of Private Practice of the S.M.A. met the Deputy Director of Medical Services to discuss ways and means in which practitioners in the private sector could help if an emergency arose. Another bright spot in an otherwise unfortunate episode in the history of this region was the prompt assistance which the Singapore blood transfusion service gave to Malaysia. Over two hundred and twenty pints of blood were sent over when they were most needed.

The fact that the disturbances in Singapore were speedily dealt with and contained was doubtless due to the efficiency of our small but well-disciplined police and armed forces. We have much to be thankful for. Whatever our race, religion or political creed, it should be obvious to all the importance of having an effective force to maintain law and order in the country in a national emergency. The nucleus of such an effective force is already in existence. With increased expansion of the armed forces it will become necessary to provide adequate medical care for all those in the services.

It has been four years since the Prime Minister met the

Council of the S.M.A. on this issue. If the authorities feel that the doctors have not been very helpful in this matter, and that there was some dragging at the heels, this should only be expected.

It would be pointless to debate what went wrong and where. There has been evidently a "breakdown in communication" between the S.M.A. and the Ministry. The present Council members are not the ones who met the Prime Minister and little would be gained in raking over the past.

What is more important is that a positive scheme to help out the armed forces should be formulated by the S.M.A. here and now. In order to be able to come up with something concrete, members of the S.M.A. are asked to fill in a questionnaire on the subject and send it in. Thus far over a hundred and fifty have replied, nearly all are in favour of the idea of giving voluntary help to the armed forces. The response is much better than that given four years ago, but is still not good enough. Whether you are in favour or not it is important that you should send your reply in. After all you may have a point in objecting to any such scheme. You may on the other hand be able to contribute something positive in the methods of implementing the scheme. One member did not believe that any form of voluntary medical service to the military could ever amount to any "effective" force and he would therefore not subscribe to the idea. He may be wrong, but at least he replied and told us what could be possible pitfalls in the idea. Replying in the affirmative would not commit you to anything but it would enable us to know what we can offer in the form of voluntary service. The worst you can do is to ignore the circular. Tidopathy has no place in our present day society. There are of course those without minds of their own and would drift with the crowd.

Let us hope there are not many in the S.M.A.

Four years ago the Newsletter in its present form was not on the scene. Members could plead ignorance to the goings-on in the S.M.A. Council. In the last issue you have read what the Minister for Health thought of the S.M.A. Some found it unpalatable, others thought it was a grossly distorted picture. Whatever it was the image was not a flattering one. Is our public image any better than the one drawn by the Ministry? Or don't we care?

We all have our own convictions. We all have our own ideas of what things should be or how the S.M.A. should be run. It would be the height of arrogance if we said that we could do no wrong, nor never did anything wrong. Self-criticism may not be a virtue, but it leads at least to self-knowledge. And with self-knowledge we will get the self-assurance to do what we know is right. So do let us have the facts and do let us set things humming.

AGGRESSIVE ?

Good heavens! Is that how we appear to others? The Newsletter of the Malayan Medical Association admires us for our "appealing format and aggressive approach." We are sure that by "aggressive", they do not mean that we have an ill-disposition, or an anti-social character. We prefer to look upon the word "aggressive" as meaning, "forward-looking, full of spirit and fight". Yes, we are aggressive if viewed in the latter context. We are always striving to reach loftier things, we are always fighting against ignorance and prejudice, and we're always trying to do our little bit for the betterment of the health of the people of Singapore.

The M.M.A. Newsletter is new on the local medical scene and we welcome it. It is an excellent production and we hope we will continue to see it as a regular feature and a responsible organ and mouth-piece of our sister association

The S.M.A. is organising a Second Medical Convention to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Singapore. The theme at this convention will be on "General Practice and Progress of Medicine in Singapore."

The Convention will run concurrently with the Academy of Medicine's Fourth Singapore / Malaysia Congress of Medicine.

Highlights of the Convention would include two Public Forums. The first will be held on Sunday, 17th August at 8.15 at the Pathology Lecture Theatre and will be on the Future of Medicine in Singapore. The speakers are Prof. V.K. Pillay, Mr. Y. Cohen, Dr. Ho Guan Lim (the Director of Medical Services) and Dr. Colin Marcus (former D.M.S.). With Dr. Nalla Tan in the chair this should prove an interesting evening. Physicians and others who feel that the surgeons should not have all the say should endeavour to attend and speak from the floor.

The second public forum is on Monday, 18th August at 8.15 p.m. at the same place. This will be on Cardiovascular Diseases and the main speakers are Dr. Charles Toh, Dr. Loh Tee Fun, Dr. Albert Wee, Dr. M.B. Ghosh, and Mr. Tan Ngoh Chuan. Dr. K. Kanagaratnam is chairing this forum. This will provide busy practitioners with all the latest gen on the subject. You can't afford to let the patients know more than you on this can you? After all they might be attending!

Dr. Gwee Ah Leng will deliver the S.M.A. Lecture on "Medical Education in Singapore—Past and Future", after the opening ceremony by Mr. P. Coomaraswamy Speaker of the Singapore Parliament, on Thursday 14th August at 6.00 p.m.

There is also the Convention Dinner and Dance to be held jointly with the 4th Singapore-Malaysia Congress of Medicine at the Tropicana on

Friday, the 15th August. It is expected that there will be a new floor show by then. As seating is limited you are advised to book early. The charge is \$25/- per head.

Included in the Convention is a course of 30 lectures for General Practitioners. This will take up two week-ends, the 16th-17th August and the 23rd-24th August. Some members have asked how and why were the various speakers chosen. The criteria for selecting the speakers were that they should have shown an interest in the subjects they were to speak on, and that they would be willing to do so. We regret that there has been insufficient G.P. participation but doubtless this would be rectified at future conventions. We welcome participation by as many members as possible and those who are keen, but have not been able to participate in the talks this time, should contact the S.M.A. Secretary on later occasions.

The cost of attending the Convention is \$20/- to S.M.A. members and \$50 for non-members. The fee for late registration, (after 31st July) is \$30/- for S.M.A. members. Besides admission to all forums and lectures, participants in the Convention will be invited to an informal lunch on Sunday 17th August, and an informal dinner on Saturday, 23rd August. Altogether extremely good value for money. Food for the mind, and food for the G.I.T. It would be difficult to ask for more!

Have you registered for the Convention?
Ring James Soh
Tel: 981264



Latest reports indicate that donations to the Community Chest Fund are somewhat slow. Will members please send in their donations as soon as possible. All donations to the Wheel Chair Project are tax-free.

IN MEMORIAM



Dr. Koh Soh Tian
1st May 1938 — 22 May 1969.

Dr. Koh was a bright student of St. Hilda's school topping her class from 1950 to 1954. She was awarded the Graham White Scholarship to do a course at the Singapore Institute of Science. She was an ambitious student, a very good Latin scholar belonging to a lively Latin class, full of mischief but yet able to master their Latin to get through their examination with good results.

She completed her post-school certificate in 1957 and the same year joined the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Singapore. Three years later she received a Singapore Government bursary and in 1963 she graduated. She was a good swimmer, a keen badminton and netball player, and fond of classical music.

As a houseman we remember her as a doctor who had feelings and con-

cern for her patients and their families. She was interested in reading and would work up her cases well and present them with confidence.

One admires Soh Tian for her courageous and dauntless spirit in spite of the fact that she knew the end was near. She was very interested in the progress of her colleagues and their future and never spoke of her illness. To serve her patients she

worked right up to a few weeks before her death in spite of having undergone major operations and medical therapy. In this respect she has set an example for us her medical colleagues to follow. We all miss her and extend our heartfelt sympathy to her husband, Mr. Peter Low, Singapore Airport Manager, and her little son, eighteen month old Edwin.

F. M. P.

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Editorial

in Malaya. It will certainly do much to bring about a better understanding by the public of the views and problems of the medical profession in this part of the world.

The importance of presenting a correct image of the medical profession is one that needs little elaboration. There are unfortunately a few who take a dim view of the profession as a whole. Whatever may have been their reason for doing so in the past, we hope with a better understanding of doctors and their problems they will not continue to believe that "all is rotten in the state of Denmark."

The S.M.A. Newsletter is not a propaganda organ of the Singapore Medical Association. It was never meant to be. We're in existence to provide a medium for expression for our members and our Association, so that people who matter, might come to know us all a little better, and we hope, thereby understand our problems a lot more.

Some of our members will probably take us to task on this. These will be the people whose letters we have had to publish in a very much modified and attenuated form. They doubtless feel that by trimming their letters we have also let the wind out of their sails.

To these people we tender our apologies but nonetheless we are sincere in our belief that if we are to be taken seriously we have first of all to act in a responsible manner. We do not feel that by publishing libellous articles or vituperative epithets in our columns that we will add to a better understanding of the problems of the profession. Colourful language may lend heat to an argument but hardly anything else. We feel that those who sling mud around tend to lose more ground in any argument in the end.

We have therefore always tried to be objective in our approach. In any controversial issue we have always tried to present both sides of the picture. We ourselves accept criticism just as readily as we have been free with our comments.

At the last A.G.M. a few members wanted the Newsletter muzzled. They wanted the S.M.A. Council to vet our editorial content. Some asked that the circulation be restricted only to S.M.A. members. Have we anything to hide? We think not, and we hope not. The S.M.A. is not a secret organisation, there is nothing clandestine in our activities or within our pages. We feel that if people got to know us better this could only result in a salubrious effect for both the profession and the community

which it serves. Some who objected to a free circulation of the Newsletter did so because it would give undesirable publicity to certain members of the profession. This is a plausible reason, but unfortunately there were others who were more parochial in their outlook, and wanted the circulation restricted no matter what the reason.

In twelve months the Newsletter has been able to bring out no less than ten issues. This in itself is an achievement which we think other Newsletters would be hard put to match. During this time we have been discussed in the press, by our colleagues in their waiting-rooms, and even the Minister for Health has had occasion to quote from our lines.

We like to think we are fulfilling an important role in presenting the correct image of the doctor to the people. Our task is not an easy one. So many people have so many different ideas of what the doctor should or should not be, should or should not do. We have received much help from many well-known local contributors like Dr. Gwee Ah Leng, Dr. Tan Joo Liang, Prof. M. Colbourne and Prof. O. T. Khoo. From abroad Prof. G. Carstairs of Edinburgh University and Dr. John Hunt, President of the Royal College of General Practitioners have also enlightened us with their

articles. There will be more articles from personages of note in following issues, and Prof. Richard Scott, the first Professor of General Practice in the world, Prof. Linford Rees of London University, Prof. Gandevia of Sydney and Dr. H.M. Gilles of the London School of Tropical Medicine have all agreed to help.

We have endeavoured to make each issue of the Newsletter worthy of something more than a passing glance, something which provides more than mere entertainment — something which provides food for thought. In this task we

shall need the co-operation of all our members, we shall need your thoughts and your articles. If there has been a slant towards articles on General Practice, this has not been intentional. We have asked for articles from the other disciplines. Many have been promised, but alas few have been delivered.

We know that indolence does not always mean indifference or ineptitude, yet we would like more active participation from all. In the final analysis it is not our opinion which counts, but yours which should matter most.

AROUND THE COUNCIL

On 16th June 1969, the Council and the International Committee met leading members of the Medical Associations of Australia, Ceylon, Malaya, and New Zealand over dinner for informal discussions.

The guests were Dr. L. Miranda, President-elect Ceylon Medical Association, Dr. Lim Kee Jin, President M.M.A., Dr. Rober Wall, member of Council, A.M.A. Dr. Winton, Editor of the Medical Journal of Australia, and Dr. J. Lovell-Smith, Medical Secretary, Medical Association of New Zealand.

They were passing through Singapore, and most of them

had attended the Seminar on Medical Co-operation and Community Medicine held in Tokyo recently. The discussions with the S.M.A. representatives centred around the strengthening of ties between the several Medical Associations represented and the feasibility of voluntary medical insurance schemes in the respective countries.

All the guests said that they enjoyed their visit to Singapore very much and that they hoped their respective Associations would be able to send representatives to our Second Medical Convention in August.

June 1969 — The President Dr. Phoon Wai-On attended the

Seminar on Medical Co-operation and Community Medicine in Tokyo as representative of the S.M.A.

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A delegation comprising of Drs. W.O. Phoon, Tan Joo Liang, S.H. Tow and E.K. Koh appeared before the Select Committee of the Singapore Parliament on 19th and 26th June to give evidence in support of the S.M.A. Memorandum on the draft Abortion bill.

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More S.M.A. publications will follow the recent book on Ethics. These include ones on "Koro", and "Occupational Health."

W.O. PHOON

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