

SMA'S LETTER AND MOH'S REPLY ON HIGHER HEALTHCARE CLAIMS ALLEGATION IN THE MEDIA

On 25 March 2018, a local newspaper published an article on rising healthcare costs, alleging that “the [Ministry of Health] MOH concluded that much of the higher claims was the result of overcharging and overtreatment by doctors in the private sector.”

SMA was very concerned that such a generalisation, if made without basis, would amount to bringing disrepute to the medical profession. SMA immediately wrote to seek clarification from MOH on 26 March 2018 to ascertain if the above statement is true and, if it was so, what the basis of that conclusion is.

On 30 March 2018, the newspaper subsequently responded on its “What It Should Have Been” section and clarified that “This [the statement within the 25 March 2018 article published] is incorrect. The Ministry of Health did not draw such a conclusion.”

On 5 April 2018, MOH replied to SMA's letter, stating that “MOH has never drawn such a conclusion or made statements alluding to this view”; contrary to what had been reported by Ms Salma Khalik, the newspaper's reporter. MOH's reply is reproduced on page 13.

SMA views allegations that bring the medical profession into disrepute seriously, as it undermines the public's trust in doctors and impacts the doctor-patient relationship. We will continue to work with MOH to ensure that the healthcare system in Singapore continues to work for doctors and their patients.

The correction statement from the newspaper can be found here: <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/whats-news-march-30-2018>.

SMA'S LETTER TO MOH

Via email & post

26 March 2018

Ms Lim Siok Peng
Director (Corporate Communications), Corporate Communications Division
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



Dear Ms Lim,

Statement alleging MOH's conclusion on higher claims

We refer to the news report published in both *The Sunday Times* and *The Straits Times Online*, titled "Diagnosing the cause of rising costs" dated 25 March 2018, by Salma Khalik.

In the report, Ms Khalik wrote: "Drilling down, the MOH concluded that much of the higher claims was the result of overcharging and overtreatment by doctors in the private sector."

We write to ask the Ministry if the above statement is true, and if it so, what was the basis of that conclusion.

It is important that our Members have a very clear understanding of the basis on which that allegation attributed to the MOH was made. Some may feel that making such a generalisation amounts to bringing disrepute to the medical profession

Yours sincerely,

Dr Wong Tien Hua
President, Singapore Medical Association

Cc. A Prof Benjamin Ong
Director of Medical Services, MOH

MOH'S REPLY

Via post

2 April 2018

Dr Wong Tien Hua
President, Singapore Medical Association

Dear Dr Wong,

Re: Inaccurate ST Report on MOH's Conclusion on Higher Claims

We refer to your letter dated 26 March 2018 addressed to Ms Lim Siok Peng.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) shares the Singapore Medical Association's concern regarding Ms Salma Khalik's report in *The Straits Times* ("Diagnosing the cause of rising costs", 25 March 2018), where she made an inaccurate statement that "Drilling down, the MOH concluded that much of the higher claims was the result of overcharging and overtreatment by doctors in the private sector".

MOH has never drawn such a conclusion or made statements alluding to this view. We have consistently maintained that all stakeholders – healthcare professionals and providers, insurers and policyholders, employers, patients and caregivers, and the Government – have a part to play in keeping healthcare costs affordable and sustainable for all Singaporeans.

We have pointed out the inaccuracy to *The Straits Times*, and they have published the erratum on 30 March 2018. A scanned copy is attached.

Ensuring that healthcare cost remains affordable and sustainable for current and future generations of Singaporeans requires the collective effort of all. We look forward to working closely with SMA and the medical community on this important endeavour.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Ngiam Siew Ying
Deputy Secretary (Policy), Ministry of Health