

REASONS TO 'NOT' JOIN SMA

Text by Dr Tan Yia Swam, Editor


Without knowing it, I have been an SMA Member for more than a decade, ever since my graduation in 2004. I think back then all of us signed up for the perpetual fee waiver on the UOB-SMA Visa Platinum Card! *hahahaha*

Since then, I have somehow been more involved than I thought I would be – as an *SMA News* editorial board member, SMA Council Member; and have taken over as the newsletter's editor for a few years now. **Some people have left membership because they don't see any benefits or don't have the time. Some friends have also asked how and why I do it.**

Rather than explaining why I joined the SMA and participate actively, I thought instead to consider the reasons to not join or the reasons why people quit.

Dr Tan is a consultant at the Breast Department of KK Women's and Children's Hospital. She continues to juggle the commitments of being a doctor, a wife, the *SMA News* Editor and the increased duties of a mother of three. She also tries to keep time aside for herself and friends, both old and new.





I won't join the SMA because I don't want to be a part of something larger than myself. I am happy in my job, my department, my clinic, my residency and my own practice. There is no need for me to be involved in national policies; there is no need for my voice to be heard.

I don't need the SMA because I have membership in other professional bodies. I like to mingle and talk to people who are like me. I'm a GP; I only need to talk to GPs. I'm a specialist; I only need to talk to my own subspecialists. The SMA is too diverse; they take in any doctor (young/old, generalist/specialist). In fact, they even have student members! I don't see why they would want to involve the students – they are not even doctors yet, they are only future doctors. Why would I want to invest and protect the future?

I don't need the SMA because they are just a wine and dine "extra-curricular group" – that's all they write about in *SMA News*. I don't read their educational articles under the Executive Series column, or the ones by SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (CMEP). I don't hear about the meetings held by the Council every month; I don't hear about the meetings these volunteers hold with other stakeholders in healthcare. I don't know that they suffer income loss by closing clinics to attend those meetings. After all, in my department, attending a meeting just means I see fewer patients while still getting paid the same. I'm sure it's the same for them.

I don't need the SMA because they don't speak up for doctors. The newsletter only carries articles by their invited doctors, I have never read the Editorial that openly welcomes and invites anyone to write in about anything. I would much rather complain on Facebook or in WhatsApp chat groups. Anonymous snide complaints are the most effective. Anonymously voicing my unhappiness and disgruntlement on the Ministers' Facebook pages is the best way to change things.

I don't trust the SMA because they are in the Ministry of Health's back pocket. That's why they have never spoken up in public about key issues. If they really care about patients and doctors, SMA should have an open public confrontation instead of having meetings to hold confidential, mature discussions about the challenges in healthcare.

I don't need the SMA because I know exactly how to be a doctor. I don't need their continuing medical education activities, I don't need the membership portal or access to discounts for medical equipment. I don't need to know other people outside of my department. If I need help, I can always google or call a friend, or just refer the patient to whoever is on call.

I don't need the SMA because they do nothing for me; I also don't have to do anything for them. I am busy enough trying to juggle between finishing my training, socialising, looking after my family, doing my work and running my practice. Why should I give up my time for an organisation that does nothing for me?

I don't need the SMA because I don't need their help. I am a very good and safe doctor. I have never had any patient complaints or lawsuits. I don't need SMA's advice or access to their legal advisors. If I ever have any problems, I can easily appoint my own lawyers. I don't need the SMA Council and their friendly advice, nor do I need their network of friends and connections for advice. I would rather pay for a professional lawyer.

I don't want to join the SMA because they are very expensive. I don't see why I have to pay the ridiculous sum of \$214 per year! Especially compared to other annual expenses like the membership fees for College of Family Physicians Singapore at \$192.60 and Academy of Medicine, Singapore at \$800, and the Singapore Medical Council's practising certificate at \$450. I have already paid \$50,000 per year in tuition fees to get my MBBS; I am not going to spend another \$200 more! I need to save on this \$200, so that I can buy my resale Housing and Development Board flat at \$400,000, or a second-hand small Japanese car at \$50,000.

Whenever people ask me why I join the SMA, I don't have a clear answer. I can only share that I make time for people and things I hold dear.

I look at the seniors in the SMA, those whom I know personally and admire greatly. I know what they have given for the SMA.

I think the SMA has a noble ideology that represents the best that doctoring should be and I can only hope that I can aspire to match up to the ideals. ◆