

Finishing Well

The Annual National Medico-Legal Seminar 2018

Text by M Kayal Pillay

The Medico-Legal Society of Singapore (MLSS) and SMA took a plunge in crafting a seminar on a weighty topic for the Annual National Medico-Legal Seminar: Death and Dying. Over the course of two days, ethicists, lawyers, clinicians and allied health professionals debated and shared on many relevant and practical issues. Several anecdotal experiences brought tears to the participants' eyes.

Dr Lee Yik Voon (President, SMA) welcomed over 120 participants as he opened the seminar on 6 October. Former State Coroner Mr Marvin Bay shared on the process of coronial investigations and Dr Lai Siang Hui (President, MLSS) drew on his personal experience to advise on pitfalls in death certification. A bevy of experts spoke of palliative care, comfort care and even terminal sedation. While varied, at its core, it is about choice. In fact, A/Prof Lalit Kumar noted that it is the fear of pain and the loss of dignity which plague many. Participants also learnt about the challenges of palliative care in the institutional and community settings.

Later in the day, Mr Wong Kok Weng (MLSS) led a distinguished panel in a discussion on "Tough Calls in the Final Days". Aside from medical professionals, the panel also included a pastor, Rev Raymond Fong, and a former judge and State Coroner, Mr Malcolm

Tan (MLSS). Many highlighted that an important aspect of dying with dignity was understanding the person behind the patient – what would they consider "living"? Controversial issues, such as deathbed conversions and their legal implications, were also explored.

Bright and early the following day, A/Prof Kwek Tong Kiat kicked off the day on organ transplantation by unravelling the medical and emotional thicket that is brain death. A/Prof Kwek cautioned that the passing of the Human Organ Transplantation Act had drastically reduced the conversation on organ donation. Discussions on whether mandatory organ donation took away from the inherently altruistic nature of the act also ensued. Other eminent professionals who shared their thoughts included a representative from the Office of the Public Guardian, Ms Regina Ow, and Adj Prof Jeffrey Chan, S.C.

Mr Edmund Kronenburg (Vice-President, MLSS) then led a panel discussion which included Ms Serene Lee, a heart transplant recipient. She shared her heart-warming tale of meeting her then 18-year-old donor's parents and allowing them to listen to their daughter's heartbeat. The seminar ended on an encouraging note with Mr Kronenburg proposing future directions to promote organ donation in Singapore. ◆

Kayal is a Deputy Public Prosecutor with the Attorney-General's Chambers. She is mainly involved in prosecuting public order crimes and crimes against the person. She graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Laws (Honours). In addition, she is currently the Secretary of the Medico-Legal Society of Singapore.

