

# President's WELCOME ADDRESS



Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

Good evening, Director-General of Health Prof Kenneth Mak, Dr Lim Wee Kiak, Member of Parliament for Sembawang GRC, President of the Malaysian Medical Association Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz, President of the Medical Association of Thailand Prof Prakitpunthu Tomtitchong, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome to all of you.

By standing at this podium tonight, I have come full circle. Years ago, my wedding dinner was held in this ball-room, and I never thought I would be up on this stage again to give a speech.

In the past year as SMA President, I have had the privilege to meet many interesting people, not only doctors but also those from other walks of life. I have received numerous feedback from the ground and suggestions on how to make things better. Hopefully, through the SMA, I have been able to address at least some of these concerns.

I would like to recap some of the efforts by SMA on behalf of the medical profession.

Firstly, to cater for doctors who wish to participate in the Mandatory Medical Ethics (MME) Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme, the SMA invested in an e-learning platform and put in place modules that allow all SMA Members to easily fulfil their MME CME requirements. These comprise a distance-learning programme that can be accessed on demand, and a series of live webinars which are held once every two months. Access to all modules is complimentary for SMA Members, and I am happy that many doctors have joined the SMA in order to participate in our programme. We really appreciate all the support.

Next, the SMA has continued its representation for doctors in health insurance matters affecting especially the private specialists. We maintain our position that Integrated Shield Plan (IP) medical panels should be open to all specialists who undertake to charge reasonably, or alternatively, to have panels abolished. We have given feedback that specialists new to private practice are finding it difficult to join

panels, and this seriously reduces the pool of patients that they can treat. We have also highlighted that doctors are faced with an increased burden of paperwork and unnecessary questioning from insurers. Furthermore, we pointed out that stakeholders and regulators could look at introducing portability of insurance, so that policyholders could change their IP providers without losing their coverage for pre-existing conditions; this will ensure that existing policyholders get a fair deal. Together with the Academy of Medicine, Singapore, we have proposed improvements to the insurance dispute resolution mechanism by empowering the Financial Industry Disputes Resolution Centre, an independent dispute resolution institution, to handle health insurance disputes relating to clinical issues.

Through the SMA Doctors-in-Training (DIT) Committee, the SMA assists junior doctors by engaging the relevant sponsoring institutions and the Ministry of Health regarding concerns on the ground such as work and on-call hours,



work stress, protected time for studying, and career prospects. In December 2023, the DIT Committee organised an end-of-year dinner for house officers, together with MOH Holdings (MOHH). In April 2024, the committee held a House Officer Workshop which was conducted over Zoom and attended by well over 250 participants. The committee is also in the midst of designing a mobile app that will come pre-installed on MOHH corporate mobile phones, which will serve as a portal providing resources and help for all junior doctors.

With regard to the proposed Health Information Bill, which will make it mandatory for all licensed healthcare providers to contribute data to the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR), the SMA gave written feedback to Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung, and also met with senior officials from the Ministry of Health. Our main feedback was that the NEHR implementation should protect patient autonomy, privacy and confidentiality. We also

gave feedback on operational concerns such as the extent of the data to be contributed, the appropriate timing for implementation of the Bill and the cost implications for licensed healthcare providers.

On the social and networking aspect, the SMA hosted the 19th Mid-Term Meeting of the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations last year. We also organised the Inter-Professional Games, in which we engaged in friendly sporting competition with lawyers, engineers, accountants, architects, surveyors and valuers. Last but not least, we have started an interest group for healthcare administrators which we hope will serve as a platform for doctors involved in healthcare administration to connect, collaborate and develop professional skills.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and deepest gratitude to Members and friends of the SMA who have contributed through serving in our Council and committees, acting as our

advisors or simply by supporting us in our efforts through Membership renewal year after year.

I am grateful to Dr Raj Menon and the SMA Secretariat for organising tonight's dinner. For the year ahead, we will continue to serve Members as usual, even as we bid farewell to our current premises at the SMF Building and move to another office in the vicinity. We ask for Members' patience and understanding during the interim period. Our staff, while busy with the moving process, will still do their best to render assistance to Members.

Albert Einstein once said: "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." I believe that sums up the SMA's approach. We will not give up easily on anything that we feel is an issue that affects doctors and patients. We hope that you will continue to support us – together, we will be stronger. ♦

#### Legend

1. The 65th SMA Council with Guest of Honour Prof Kenneth Mak and distinguished guests

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