

The Editor's Musings

DR TINA TAN

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist in private practice and an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. She treats mental health conditions in all age groups but has a special interest in caring for the elderly. With a love for the written word, she makes time for reading, writing and self-publishing on top of caring for her patients and loved ones.



Just the other day, I had a meeting with a younger colleague who asked me what work the SMA Council does, and my first response was: "You have to pull back and consider what SMA does as an organisation, then you can understand what the Council does." I hope my fellow Council members are satisfied with that initial response.

That aside, the question led me to reflect on the tireless dedication of many doctors outside of their teaching, research and clinical work. When I first became a medical student, then a junior doctor, I was prepared for the extra time and effort that would go into my immediate clinical career. But nobody warned me of the undocumented and unpaid hours I would put into things beyond that, things such as the advocacy work an organisation like SMA does, and which I have somehow become a part of.

For those unfamiliar with the story, I once received a rather shocking phone call from my former surgical registrar. I am being candid when I say that I stared at my ringing phone for a long moment before answering. Note, this was two years after my housemanship. I was way into my psychiatry residency and had no dealings with surgeons except those in the hospital I worked with at the time. My days of trauma were, quite literally, behind me. Surgical trauma, that is.

That phone call came from one Dr Tan Yia Swam, who asked, "Are you an SMA Member?"

Fast forward eleven years. Dr Tan has since served a term as SMA President, as a Nominated Member of Parliament, and is currently an appointed member of the Singapore Medical Council (SMC).

Meanwhile, I received my ten-year Long Service Award from SMA for my contributions, first as an *SMA News* Editorial Board member, and then as Editor. Alas, I was dealing with yet another COVID-19 infection and was unable to receive my award in person alongside giants like Dr Wong Chiang Yin. In any case, I will treasure that award always.

The point is this: a medical career is not simply about practising medicine. Yes, it is about teaching the future generation of doctors, handling administrative matters and, for those inclined, doing research. These things are a given. But a significant part involves the work that professional bodies like SMA, and each of its committees, do. Who does the work? People. Specifically, fellow doctors. And these are the volunteers whose hours are often undocumented, but whose dedication results in many of the activities that have become closely associated with SMA, such as the programmes conducted by the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism, the mandatory medical ethics webinars that came into place in 2024 with SMC's new requirements for practising doctors, and our beloved SMA Charity Fund. This is not to mention the advocacy work done in the background such as by those in the Doctors-in-Training Committee, and those working closely with the Ministry of Health on contentious issues like healthcare insurance.

Which is why SMA makes it a point to show their appreciation to these volunteers for their time, for these hours are unseen, unpaid and often unthanked.

Therefore, may I add my own message here for these folks – thank you for your dedication. For doctors, for patients. ♦