



An Experience of a *Lifetime*

Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

As I come to the close of my appointment as President of SMA, I reflect on my experience with gratitude.

I am glad to have presided over a three-year period during which we increased our Membership representation to 59% of all registered doctors in Singapore. I believe our commitment to providing Members with mandatory medical ethics (MME) continuing medical education (CME) modules led many doctors to join SMA. Much credit for this goes to our team at the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism, who put up an excellent programme that helped our Members fulfil their MME CME point requirements.

Speaking up for issues that matter

I am glad that SMA has continued to advocate for issues that matter to doctors. We consistently advocated for Integrated Shield Plan (IP) panels to be open to all private specialists and more recently, spoke up for measures to limit the turnover of specialists on panels to ensure better continuity of patient care. We asked that insurers who steer patients to preferred hospitals make such arrangements fully transparent to policyholders, so that patients can make informed decisions on their choice of IP provider.

Since SMA started its advocacy efforts on IP insurance (some of which predate my presidency), there have been observed improvements in the implementation of IP panels. The majority of insurers have increased the number of specialists on their panels, from between 300 and 400 specialists per insurance panel at the beginning of 2021 to between 600 and 800 specialists in 2024.^{1,2} There have also been improvements in terms of transparency – the Ministry of Health (MOH) now publishes a yearly comparison of the number and turnover rate of private specialists on each insurer's panel on their website.² Recent panel specialist contracts no longer have clauses that oblige panel specialists to use preferred hospitals. I acknowledge that this is a work in progress and trust that SMA will continue advocating for specialists with regard to panel issues.

During this time, we provided feedback to MOH regarding the Health Information Bill (now Act) and suggested that cybersecurity and data security requirements be simplified to reduce the burden on healthcare providers. We also suggested that healthcare providers be given adequate funding support to defray the costs of implementation. We are glad that MOH has taken our feedback seriously and has undertaken to work with and support healthcare providers.

Connecting with fellow professionals

During my term, I have had the privilege and honour of engaging with leaders from MOH, Academy of Medicine, Singapore, College of Family Physicians Singapore and the local medical schools. I have also met with representatives from the Medical Associations of South East Asian Nations and enjoyed their camaraderie. These interactions have broadened my perspectives on the medical profession and the practice of medicine, far beyond the confines of my daily clinical practice, and I am grateful for all these opportunities. My three years as SMA President has truly been an experience of a lifetime.

It has not all been smooth sailing and there have been numerous stressful moments during my term. One such moment occurred in 2024, when SMA was the subject of a cybersecurity attack following a phishing email. We were fortunate that there was no exfiltration of data, and we have since fortified our cybersecurity measures.

Concluding my term

My term as President will come to an end in April 2026. It will be time to take a

step back and refocus on other priorities, such as my own medical practice and family. However, I will remain in the SMA Council to continue offering my help and support as needed.

I could not have done my job without the strong support of the SMA Council members, and I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my fellow Council members for their invaluable advice and guidance. I am also grateful to the Secretariat for the smooth execution of the Council's plans, and for organising Members' events and educational activities.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends, colleagues and Members of the SMA who have supported and encouraged my efforts as President of the SMA over the past three years. ♦

References

1. Khalik S. *IP insurers to have more specialist doctors on panels; resolution platform set up to settle disputes.* *The Straits Times* [Internet]. 9 November 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3NT5gay>.
2. Ministry of Health. *About Integrated Shield Plan.* In: *Integrated Shield Plans.* Available at: <https://bit.ly/41uzSSX>.

Dr Ng is a urologist in private practice and current President of the SMA. He has two teenage sons whom he hopes will grow much taller than him. He has probably collected too many watches for his own good.

