

The Editors' 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.



We continue our commemoration of 60 years since the very first publication of *SMA News*. For this issue, several Editors past and present (also known as yours truly) came together over a hearty meal to talk about their experiences running the newsletter and what shaped the way *SMA News* looks like now. Each experience spans eras – from the pre-Internet days to the explosion of the World Wide Web (we do not even call it *that* anymore) to now, with the onslaught of artificial intelligence and tentative discussions about making the newsletter fully digital. As for the latter, no decision has been made on this yet, so for those who cherish their paper copies, please relax.

We have also reprinted more articles which we felt were particularly meaningful and which were written by colleagues who are no strangers to us. "Hobbit's Aphorisms" remains a humorous classic which should be reprinted every few years in my honest opinion, while the timeless piece on the

calling of medicine, by Prof Goh Lee Gan and the late A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, should be required reading for medical students. Meanwhile, Dr Wong Tien Yin's article from March 1994 just goes to show that doctors-in-training issues remain important, because at some point, each of us were just starting to navigate this maze that was the start of our professional careers. To put it simply, we could all do with a little guidance sometimes.

Publishing a newsletter every month is no joke, and it is difficult to imagine the amount of behind-the-scenes work and tireless dedication which goes into *SMA News* to make it happen without fail for 60 years. Planning this and last months' issues has been an eye-opening journey for the Editorial Board and the News team. I am grateful to have been handed the opportunity to make my contribution to this platform as we continue to represent issues close to the hearts and minds of our readers.

With that, happy reading.

DR LIM ING HAAN

Guest Editor

Dr Lim is the first female interventional cardiologist in Singapore. She is an early adopter of new technology and is a key opinion leader in international cardiology conferences. She shares a clinic with her twin, Dr Lim Ing Ruen, an ENT surgeon at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Both believe in the power of food, travel, laughter and loyalty in forming strong family bonds.



Now in its 60th year, *SMA News* began publication just one year after Singapore's independence. The practice of medicine was very different in those early years. In the 60s, Western medicine was becoming increasingly prominent, gradually overtaking traditional Chinese medicine in public importance. With mass X-ray screening and mandatory BCG vaccination, tuberculosis declined as Singapore's leading killer, giving way to cancer and heart disease.¹

Public health efforts also expanded during this period. The Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association started a cardiology department in 1965.² Nationwide campaigns on family planning and dental health continued into the 1970s. These were followed by initiatives such as National Heart Week in the 1970s, the National Smoking Control Programme in the 1980s³ and the National Chronic Disease Management plan in the 2000s.

Changing concerns of the medical profession

The concerns of doctors have changed profoundly over time. Early issues of *SMA News*, initially known as the *Medical Newsletter*, reported on marriages and carried obituaries. Later issues addressed more serious topics such as the changing landscape of medical litigation and hospital restructuring. Contributors also debated on fee guidelines, reflected on the commercialisation of medicine and discussed the then novel residency programme.

Through these shifts, *SMA News* has maintained a careful distance from medico-politics while continuing to reflect the issues that matter to the profession.

Looking back, looking forward

If life really begins at 60 years old as some say, it is fitting that our August and September issues are devoted to memorable articles from the archives, offering readers a chance to revisit the publication's journey, the evolution of medicine, healthcare priorities and the concerns of doctors in Singapore over these six decades. In addition, we also interview in this issue several past Editors of *SMA News* to share their candid perspectives and experiences guiding the newsletter.

At its heart, *SMA News* remains by doctors, for doctors. Echoing the view of the Editorial Board in March 1979, the newsletter continues to seek the views of young colleagues,

and we consistently feature news from medical students and actively invite the growing number of Singaporean students pursuing medical studies overseas to contribute. Perhaps in the future, *SMA News* may come to feature interactive videos and use platforms such as TikTok to reach out to our younger readers. Looking at how much has changed from the time of the article "The Internet – Ways to Get Connected" in the November 2000 issue, I genuinely find it difficult to predict the future.

Do enjoy this issue and the back copies available on our website! A big thank you as well to our Editorial office for their efforts in uploading past issues into the electronic archives. Readers can now access digitised issues dating back to the year 2000 at: <https://sma.org.sg/news/allissues>, while issues earlier than 2000 can be found at: <https://www.sma.org.sg/news/archives>. ♦

References

1. Yong NL. Speech of Mr. Yong Nyuk Lin, Minister for Health, at the official opening of the 1st World Health Organisation Regional Tuberculosis Control Training Course held at Tan Tock Seng Hospital lecture theatre on Monday, 14th February, 1966 at 1020 hours. In: National Archives Singapore. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4y7axNw>. Accessed 26 August 2026.
2. Lee SY, Goh LK. Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association. In: National Library Online. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4c5xeck>. Accessed 26 August 2026.
3. Our History of Healthcare. In: Roots. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4i0dmLv>. Accessed 26 August 2026.

For readers curious about some of the significant topics covered in past issues of *SMA News*, a small collection of topical articles has been curated below for your reading pleasure. This list is by no means exhaustive and covers only a fraction of topics relevant to the exciting history of Singapore's medical landscape.

Public health efforts in Singapore

1. Meeting the Ongoing Challenge of Chronic Diseases (Feb 2004): <https://bit.ly/46kkOdj>

Evolving concerns of the medical profession

1. The Changing Face of Medical Litigation in Singapore (Jul 2001): <https://bit.ly/4djkc5>
2. Clustering: Boon, Bane or Bust? (May 2004): <https://bit.ly/4xlULxr>
3. Insights into Singapore's Healthcare Landscape – Interview with A/Prof Benjamin Ong (Apr 2018): <https://bit.ly/3UMMIMx>

Technological advances through the years

1. The Internet – Ways to Get Connected (Nov 2000): <https://bit.ly/4dAtWhG>
2. Are We Entering a Super-Physician Age? (Oct 2018): <https://bit.ly/4h8t9pe>

Adopting the residency programme

1. Residency – A Total System Overhaul (Nov 2009): <https://bit.ly/4A877eZ>
2. Going the American Way (Feb 2013): <https://bit.ly/4hsyhWE>

Guideline on Fees

1. Could SMA Have Not Withdrawn the Guideline on Fees? (Sep 2014): <https://bit.ly/4heKxZM>
2. Chronology of Events Leading to the Publication & Withdrawal of GOF (Apr 2007): <https://bit.ly/46X9P9L>

SMA's fight against pandemics

1. The SARS Outbreak: Immediate and Future Lessons for the Medical Profession (Apr 2003): <https://bit.ly/4yAxAAA>
2. SARS and PPE (Part 5) (Jul 2003): <https://bit.ly/4dCy1lv>
3. First 100 Days of COVID-19 – How It Impacted Medical Education (Jul 2020): <https://bit.ly/4dwWGyD>

Medical students overseas

1. Things That Resist Being Understood (Dec 2019): <https://bit.ly/4h43yOK>