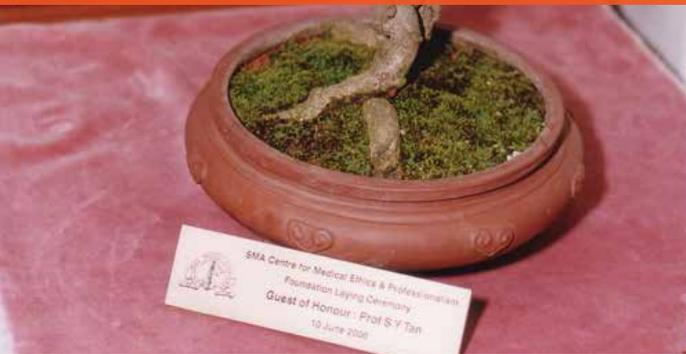




Celebrating 15 Years of SMA CMEP

By Loy Mong Shi, Manager, Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism (CMEP)



2015 MARKS the 15th year since the inauguration of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism (CMEP). On 10 June 2000, a foundation-laying ceremony was held at the National Cancer Centre Lecture Hall to officially signify the launch of SMA CMEP, with Prof Tan Siang Yong, professor of medicine and adjunct professor of law, University of Hawaii, as the keynote speaker for the ceremony. In addition to leaders from the medical profession, representatives from the professions of law, accountancy, architecture and engineering were in audience as Prof Tan laid the foundation stone of the Centre. SMA CMEP was formed to provide educational courses and resources for medical practitioners to acquire competency in the areas of medical ethics, health law and professionalism.

Conception of CMEP

In the late 1990s, the leadership of SMA and members of the SMA Complaints Committee realised that in addition to dealing with complaints from patients against doctors (a “firefighting” mode), a proactive approach to reduce and prevent complaints was necessary. The understanding at that juncture was that many of the complaints had resulted from deficits of medical education in the domains of professionalism, medical ethics, health law and communication science. The strategy was to build educational resources and courses to provide the skills and knowledge to doctors in order to reduce the number of complaints. Furthermore, local undergraduate medical education then did not place much emphasis on these areas, and many were left to face the cold reality of medical practice with little knowledge on health law and medical ethics. As a professional body for doctors, SMA assumed the mantle of meeting this important educational need.

During that period, SMA formed committees from time to time to look into pertinent issues relating to the ethical standards and professionalism of doctors. One such example was the Ethical Issues & Policy Review Committee, whose duty was to examine and evaluate the cases handled by the SMA Ethics Committee with a view to produce principles and guidelines, and organise courses and workshops for the profession. However, it was felt that a more permanent commitment should be initiated instead of forming ad-hoc groups, in order to achieve long-term impact. Therefore, a proposal to set up a formal centre for the improvement of ethical standards and professionalism of doctors was tabled and subsequently accepted at the 39th SMA Annual General Meeting in 1999.

Historical milestones

The start-up years (2000 - 2005)

SMA CMEP signed Memoranda of Understanding with Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Singapore General Hospital on 11 January 2001 to organise monthly CME seminars on medical ethics and health law in each hospital. The evening seminars, supported by the Law Society of Singapore (LSS), discussed core issues in professional ethics and health law, with doctors and lawyers sharing the same platform.

With the vision of empowering doctors to practise more effectively, the Centre embarked on a series of practice management seminars. Practice-related topics such as Doctor as Manager, Surviving Managed Care, Death Certification, Email Consultation and Locum Employment were covered in this series of seminars.

An SMA Ethics Essay Award was also established to encourage tertiary students in Singapore to conduct research and review important aspects of medical ethics.

There was a different theme each year, and a panel of judges would review the essays before selecting a winner.

The formative years (2006 - 2010)

The Centre was commissioned by the Ministry of Health and the Joint Committee on Specialist Training to develop and deliver a curriculum for a course on medical ethics, professionalism and health law. Attendance at this course is currently a mandatory requirement for exit certification for all specialist and family medicine trainees and residents.

Taking into consideration the trainees' imminent graduation as tomorrow's leaders in their respective clinical specialties, CMEP faculty devoted immense efforts to keep the course relevant to prepare them for their new responsibilities as role models, leaders of medical teams, and clinical teachers and supervisors to medical students and junior doctors working alongside them.

SMA CMEP has, so far, conducted 34 runs of the Advanced Specialist Training Professionalism and Ethics Course, and trained 2,068 doctors. Feedback from participants has been excellent, with more than 90% of the trainees from the past 17 runs finding the course useful and relevant to their work.

The expansion years (2011 - 2015)

The last five years saw an explosion of activity. Having established strong relationships with its partners over the years, SMA CMEP began to initiate collaborations with different organisations and expand its activities in terms of frequency and scope.

The Centre organised a regional two-day conference titled Professional Accountability & Professional Misconduct in November 2012. The first day of the conference consisted of three symposiums in which local and international speakers discussed issues related to professional accountability and professional misconduct. The delegates in attendance comprised doctors, lawyers and nurses from the region. The second day of the conference was a training workshop that catered to healthcare professionals who sat in judgement of their professional colleagues and conducted disciplinary inquiries.

Additionally, SMA CMEP collaborated with the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS), LSS and the State Courts of Singapore to organise the inaugural Medical Expert Training Seminar which was a two-day event held in July 2014. The seminar's objective was to equip medical practitioners with the legal knowledge and skills needed to prepare medical expert reports and give oral expert evidence. The trainees were required to complete a written medical expert report and also participated in role play where they gave oral evidence as an expert witness before a district judge in actual courtrooms.

Another landmark product of collaborative work was the Annual National Medicolegal Seminar, which SMA CMEP organised with the Medico-Legal Society of Singapore

(MLS). The two-day seminar was held in October 2013 and October 2014, with Disciplinary Inquiries in Healthcare and Understanding Mental Capacity as their respective themes.

Appreciation

SMA CMEP, guided by an independent board of directors, has managed to garner support from the best people in the field. The board and faculty are made up of senior doctors and lawyers well versed in medical ethics, professionalism and health law, who have credible capability to educate and train the medical profession in these areas.

The development of SMA CMEP would not have been possible without the dedication and leadership of Dr T Thirumorthy (Founding Director, 2000 - 2003 and Executive Director, 2011 - present) and A/Prof Chin Jing Jih (Executive Director, 2004 - 2010), and the support from the Board and faculty members, past and present. The past managers of SMA CMEP, Ms Ng Wee Fong and Ms Caroline Tan, together with Mr Martin Ho and the rest of the SMA Secretariat, have also contributed significantly to the success of the Centre's projects over the past 15 years.

Core mission remembered

At the SMA CMEP's foundation-laying ceremony 15 years ago, Prof Tan Siang Yong was quoted as saying, "The Centre is such an extraordinary achievement, refreshing in its rarity, and important beyond mere symbolism. In safeguarding all that is sacred about the medical profession, your precious Centre is making a simple and uncompromising statement that the patient will always come first."

Indeed, SMA CMEP will live up to its mission and continue to work towards providing lifelong learning, so as to keep the medical profession altruistic, competent and ethical in the years to come. ■

SMA CMEP has a regular faculty of more than 25 members comprising doctors and lawyers:

A/Prof Chin Jing Jih	Dr T Thirumorthy
Dr Gerald Chua	Dr Luke Toh Han Wei
Dr Anantham Devanand	Dr Wu Huei Yaw
Dr Habeebul Rahman	Dr Jason Yap
Dr Hairil Rizal Abdullah	Dr Bertha Woon
Dr Allyn Hum	
Dr Daniel Kwek	Ms Rebecca Chew
Dr Angel Lee	Mr Christopher Chong
A/Prof Lai Siang Hui	Mr Edmund Kronenburg
A/Prof Gilbert Lau	Mr Lek Siang Pheng
Dr Lee See Muah	Ms Mak Wei Munn
Dr Peter Loke	Dr Albert Myint Soe
Dr Seow Wan Tew	Mr Tham Hsu Hsien
Dr Leslie Tay	Mr Eric Tin
A/Prof Cuthbert Teo	Mr Edwin Tong