



SMA LECTURE 2016

It was an enlightening afternoon at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel for close to 100 doctors, healthcare professionals and medical students, who gathered for the SMA Lecture 2016 on 5 November. This year's lecture on Health and Human Rights was delivered by Prof Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran.

Upon registration, attendees mingled and chatted while enjoying a generous buffet spread. Everyone was soon seated and the programme got underway with Dr Wong Tien Hua, President of SMA, delivering his welcome address promptly at 2 pm (see page 9). He spoke about something close to home – the outbreak of the Zika virus here in August. He cited the outbreak as a fine example of why the link between medical ethics and human rights is important for practising clinicians. He also highlighted that equality and social justice are fundamental principles regardless of the individual's differences and backgrounds. Prof Yong Eu Leong, head of National University Hospital's Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, then took to the stage to deliver the citation for Prof Sir Arulkumaran (see page 7). Prof Yong highlighted many of

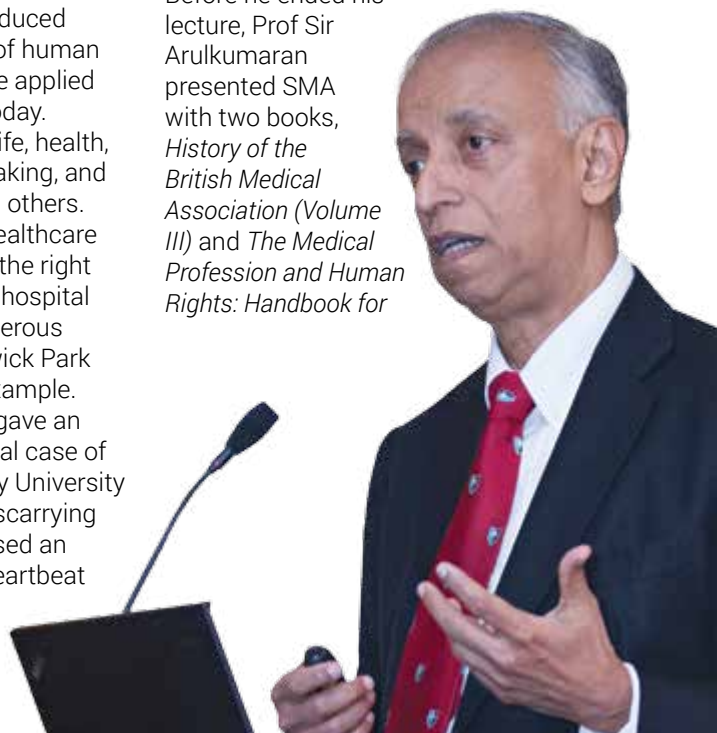
Prof Sir Arulkumaran's outstanding achievements in the field of obstetrics and gynaecology and shared how he is well-suited to deliver the day's lecture on health and human rights, given his passion for both.

Prof Sir Arulkumaran began his lecture by giving the audience examples of how doctors during the Holocaust violated the trust placed in them by performing despicable acts of genocide, torture and medical experiments. He then introduced the established principles of human rights, and how they can be applied to daily medical practice today. These include the right to life, health, autonomy and decision-making, and non-discrimination, among others. He then highlighted how healthcare systems can compromise the right to life, using how lapses in hospital protocols had caused numerous maternal deaths at Northwick Park Hospital in the UK as an example. Prof Sir Arulkumaran also gave an insight into the controversial case of a woman's death at Galway University Hospital in Ireland. The miscarrying woman was allegedly refused an abortion because a fetal heartbeat was present. The doctors feared breaching the Irish anti-abortion criminal law

but in doing so, denied the mother of her right to life.

In his closing remarks, Prof Sir Arulkumaran cautioned the audience that human rights abuse may be happening daily under our very eyes. He urged all to volunteer their time to help in worthy causes so that the less fortunate will have the opportunity to enjoy their right to good health.

Before he ended his lecture, Prof Sir Arulkumaran presented SMA with two books, *History of the British Medical Association (Volume III)* and *The Medical Profession and Human Rights: Handbook for*





a *Changing Agenda*, as well as a medallion he received in 1998 in commemoration of the 1948 declaration of human rights.

Following the lecture, a panel discussion was held to address some of the burning questions from the audience. On the panel were Prof Sir Arulkumaran, Dr Chia Shi-Lu, A/Prof Toh Han Chong and moderator A/Prof Nigel Tan. The panellists and audience held meaningful discussions on the topic of human rights and various aspects of medical practice which are of particular concern, such as the right to die, resource allocation and abortions. An audience member highlighted how the Nordic model of "dishonourable disobedience" disallows the conscientious objection of abortion by doctors in countries where abortion is legal, and raised a query on how this model can be adapted in similar countries. Prof Sir Arulkumaran responded that doctors who are unable to perform abortions due to their personal religions or beliefs cannot be forced to do so. He stressed that to avoid negative impacts on the mother's

health and rights, hospitals could possibly employ consultants and registrars who are able to take on this responsibility so that such cases can be referred to them accordingly.

The afternoon then drew to a close and the attendees took home with them valuable insights that they can relate to in their own medical practices. It was indeed a thought-provoking lecture which encouraged clinicians to become keen advocates of health and human rights for the benefit of their patients, regardless of their backgrounds and differences.

The SMA Council would like to thank Prof Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, Prof Yong Eu Leong, our panellists and all attendees for making the SMA Lecture 2016 a successful one.

Finally, we would also like to express our heartfelt thanks to A/Prof Tan Lay Kok, president of the Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Singapore, for being the emcee for the afternoon, and Thomson Medical for being a generous sponsor. ♦

PROFILE

TEXT BY

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Editorial Executive

Legend

1. SMA Council Members posing for a group photo with Prof Sir Arulkumaran
2. A/Prof Ong Biau Chi raising a query during the panel discussion
3. The audience listening intently and taking notes during the Lecture
4. Prof Ong Yong Yau conversing with Prof Sir Arulkumaran over a cup of tea
5. Prof Sir Arulkumaran presenting the books and the medallion to Dr Wong Tien Hua