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# IF THE SMA IS TO HAVE *Meaning*

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If the Singapore Medical Association is to have meaning then it must identify itself with society and constantly be guided by the principle of ensuring that the citizens of our Republic will get the best that medicine can provide.

The Singapore Medical Association was established ten years ago when Dr. B. R. Sreenivasan was elected its first President. In the first few years of its establishment, only part-time secretaries were employed and the majority of the secretarial duties were done by our past honorary secretaries and other doctors who dedicated their time to the development of the Association. To them, the Association owes its gratitude.

We have now reached a phase of development when it is no more possible for the Association to face up to the many issues and challenges before it without full-time efficient administrative machinery.

The important decision for members is whether doctors who are the experts in the art and the practice of medicine should have a say in the type of medical practice that the citizens of Singapore should be provided with. As the

only way doctors can have their views represented collectively is through the Singapore Medical Association, it follows that if the Association is weak and lacks organisation, the Government will have to decide on policies affecting medical practice unilaterally.

On the other hand, no Government or Ministry of Health can afford to ignore a national medical association which has, by its activities and organisation, shown itself to have the capacity to give effective guidance on medical policies in the best interest of the Republic.

It therefore seems clear that there is a need to further strengthen the Singapore Medical Association.

There is firstly the need to collect sufficient funds in order to provide adequate fulltime secretarial help. At a later stage, the honorary secretaries and honorary editors may need to be replaced by full-time professional staff. Then there is a host of other auxiliary staff necessary to run an effective administration. Most of all, the Association needs dedicated doctors with the determination to elevate the standard of practice of

medicine to keep with the change of time: doctors who will generate unity amongst the profession and lend coolness to judgement and cohesiveness to controversial deliberations: doctors who are prepared to provide leadership even if it means incurring official displeasure, to achieve what they consider will ultimately be in the best interest to society and in the practice of the profession.

In the absence of effective organisation, the doctors of Singapore will not look up to the Association for leadership and in moments of crises, bewilderment may prevail leading to a sense of helplessness and apathy.

Thus in the final analysis if the Singapore Medical Association is to play its role effectively, the first fundamental need is for all members of the Association to give of their best and be prepared to meet the increased cost of maintaining an effective secretariat for the strength of the Singapore Medical Association lies not in a few leaders but in the collective unity of all its members. ♦