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# Working Together for Better Health for the People of ASEAN

The Medical Association of Southeast Asian Nations (MASEAN), at the beginning of the 21st century, has transformed from an Association of only 5 members in 1980, to a vibrant Association of 10 members consisting of Brunei (Associate) Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR (Associate), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. MASEAN members meet every year to discuss issues of mutual concern. It is a time where members are given updates on the health and healthcare situations in ASEAN countries and activities carried out by the respective Associations. It is also a platform, where as a body of medical professionals from ASEAN countries, consensus and resolutions on matters of regional concerns can be reached and through the pool of talents and resources available, programmes can be carried out cooperatively to improve the services in healthcare delivery to the people of ASEAN.

The Mid-term Council Meeting of the 9th MASEAN Meeting was held in Yangon, Myanmar on 17-18 November 2000. The opening ceremony was a grand affair, graced by the presence of Lt-General Khin Nyunt, Chairman of National Health Committee, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council who delivered the opening address. Besides the MASEAN delegates, ministers, the Yangon Mayor, deputy ministers, members of National Health Committee and officials of the State Peace and Development Council office, officials of UN agencies, were also present.

In his opening speech, Lt-General Khin

Nyunt highlighted the improving health conditions in Myanmar as a result of economic progress and shared with the delegates the health policies and strategies adopted by the NHC, aimed at raising the level of health of the country and achieving the goal of "Health for All". In the spirit of ASEAN, delegates from the member countries posed for a photo, arms linked, as a symbol of forging closer intra-regional cooperation.

## COUNTRY UPDATES

Member countries, with the exception of the Philippines and Brunei which were not present, took turns to report on their recent healthcare developments and Association activities.

### Cambodia

The Cambodian Medical Association (CMA) was the first to present the report. It had sent a strong delegation of 9 doctors, including the President, Prof Sau Sokkhonn to the Meeting to learn from MyMA's experience in organising MASEAN Meeting. (CMA will be hosting the Meeting next year). Established in July 1994, the CMA has made much effort in the development of medical professionals as well as improving the health and well-being of all Cambodian people. One of the programmes is the organisation of the National Day of Medicine and Pharmacy where Cambodian and foreign doctors, pharmacists as

well as health professionals from France could meet to discuss the management of human and financial resources, as well as major health problems in Cambodia such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. CMA is also actively formulating laws and regulations pertaining to management of the practice of medical and paramedical professionals, food safety and public health hygiene.

### Indonesia

Despite its vast size, the Indonesian Medical Association (IMA) is able to remain united (256 branches in total) and focused in achieving its aims of promoting the development of health sciences and medical technologies among members, and assisting the Government in improving the health status of the Indonesian population. Dr Ahmad Djojogugito, the newly elected President of IMA highlighted the Association's internal and external programmes, such as IMA guidelines on management of diseases, training of HIV, family physicians training programme, and anti-smoking campaign, amongst others.

### Lao PDR

Lao PDR which has not yet formed its national medical association, was



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represented by Dr Sommane Phounsavath, Director, Department of Curative & Rehabilitation Medicine and Dr Bounsavath Savatry, Head, Secretary Unit, Cabinet of the Ministry of Health. Dr Sommane gave a brief description of the health situations in present day Lao PDR, providing information on basic demographics and health indicators. Communicable diseases such as malaria and TB continue to be health challenges for the country, with emergence of injuries from unexploded bombs, drug addictions in some northern provinces, threats of STD and HIV/AIDS. Right now, their Ministry is developing health legislation and health insurance system to be officially implemented throughout the country by the year 2001.

#### **Malaysian Medical Association**

It has been a busy year for the MMA since its 40th council took office in May 1999, in various areas of decision making and giving input on healthcare issues to the Malaysian Government. It also met with several non-government organisations like the Bar Council, Medico-Legal Society, Malaysian Dental Association and Pharmaceutical Association on issues pertaining to the practice of medicine. The MMA has also been active in the development of its information technology. It has created a website, [www.mma.org.my](http://www.mma.org.my) which contains information on various activities of the Association. The website won the award under the non-profit organisation category at the @my'99 Awards.

#### **Myanmar Medical Association**

With over 6000 members, the MyMA is the only professional body of medically qualified doctors in Myanmar. The Association has been active in organising CME courses and medical conferences in the last one year. Besides collaborative activities with government health programmes, MyMA also held joint training courses with SMA and participated in international congresses.

#### **Singapore Medical Association**

MASEAN members were keen to find out more about the ways in which the SMA Pte Ltd was formed. Our delegation shared with them our purpose of forming a Company in order to help streamline its

activities, to be commercially viable and to prepare for the future. We also updated them on the development of SMA Centre for Ethics & Professionalism (CMEP) as well as the recent reorganisation of the public health delivery system in Singapore into 2 separate networks or clusters this year.

#### **Medical Association of Thailand (TMA)**

The Association was involved in reviewing the course in Basic Medical Science and clinical practice for physicians preparing for the medical license examination. It also participated in several overseas congresses and organised several local conferences on practice and ethics matters.

#### **Vietnam General Association of Medicine & Pharmacy**

Vietnam, after a long war, has had to cope with many difficulties in providing health care services to people. The Association has been working with the local health authority to provide consultancy activities on health policies decision making process, and organising training programmes to improve professional skills for association members. The Chairman and Deputy Secretary of MASEAN also visited and worked with various MASEAN countries in preparation of the MASEAN Meetings.

#### **WWW.MASEAN.ORG**

The revamped MASEAN Website was presented to the members for the first time. The MASEAN Secretariat represented by Ms Tan Hwee Ping of SMA led them on a virtual tour of the website, [www.masean.org](http://www.masean.org) designed by Ms Regina Chin, SMA's webmaster. Member countries which do not have their own website could now use the one created within the MASEAN website. The Association's constitution, activities and office bearers are incorporated. There was a suggestion that a dedicated website on MASEAN Journals be created, where the member countries could have



their respective journals online. However, the issue of funding would have to be further discussed. One possibility is to seek funding from ASEAN.

#### **Symposiums**

Three symposiums, which were decided at the last MASEAN meeting, were held in conjunction with this MASEAN Meeting. The topics were 1. Liberalisation of Professional and Health Services in ASEAN; 2. Community Participation in Health Care; 3. Family Medicine Development in Pacific Asia.

Abstracts of these symposiums and the detailed country reports can be found on the MASEAN Website.

#### **10th MASEAN Meeting 2001**

The delegates will be meeting again next November in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, when CMA organises the 10th MASEAN Conference in 2001. The theme of "Health In Transition" was chosen in view of the significant changes in technology and globalisation which will have an impact on health in the region. In line with the theme, 4 symposiums on "Integration & Harmonisation of the Medical Organisations", "Continuing Medical Education", "Medical Ethics & Professionalism" and "Telehealth" will be held during the MASEAN Conference.



#### **Closing Ceremony**

The Mid-term Meeting came to a close amidst a song and dance item presented by our host, Myanmar Medical Association. Delegates were invited to dance to a traditional Myanmar song which is sung during their harvest season. Our very own MASEAN flag, which was made overnight, was handed over by Prof Myo Myint of MyMA to Prof Sau Sokkhonn, President of CMA, the next host of the 10th MASEAN Meeting. We wish to thank MyMA for their excellent organisation of the Meeting and their warm reception. Till we meet again in Phnom Penh in Nov 2001. ■