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SMA

NEWS

"Let's Work as a Team for Singaporeans!"

IT has been eventful for the medical profession. The Ministry of Health introduced a few new programmes which generated different reactions from the doctors. The reactions are rather mixed.

Let's look at the happier ones first. We have the Primary Care Partnership Scheme (PCPS) in which the Government pays subvention to GPs who treat acute illnesses among needy indigent elderly and those on the public assistance scheme. This scheme offers the patients more choices. I believe the scheme is well received by the patients, the doctors, and the public at large.

Then we have the Comprehensive Chronic Care Programme (CCCP), which is aimed at managing three major chronic illnesses that afflict Singaporeans - diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The programme provides a more structured system of care that would result in better control of these diseases. This would reduce longer term complications. To complement this, my Ministry will be working with the College of Family Physicians of Singapore to involve interested GPs in a parallel effort in the private sector. I believe the CCCP programme has also been well received by the patients, the doctors and the public at large.

The reactions to two other initiatives, namely the Faculty Practice Plan and the opening of Night Clinics in polyclinics, are however more mixed. Members of the public welcome the Night Clinics, as

*Speech by Guest-of-Honour, Mr Chan Soo Sen,
Senior Parliamentary Secretary
(Prime Minister's Office & Ministry of Health)
during the SMA Annual Dinner on 21st April 2001 at Regent Hotel*

these give them more choices. There are, however, more concerns over the Faculty Practice Plan. Members of the public welcome any scheme that improves medical services if the improved services remain affordable. However, they fear that allowing private specialists to operate in public hospitals may result in larger hospital bills. Some are concerned that waiting times for subsidised patients may become longer if doctors are involved with more private patients through the Faculty Practice Plan.

But how do the doctors feel? Doctors in the private sector are concerned about both the Faculty Practice Plan and the Night Clinics. One of the concerns must have been concern over loss in business. Representatives from the SMA therefore have met with the Minister to raise the concerns of their members in relation to these new initiatives.

Change always disturbs to start with. So I can empathise with your feelings. I would just like to assure you that all these programmes:

- are initiated for the good of the public, and not at the expense of the doctors in the private sector;
- contain opportunities for co-operation between public and private sector doctors.

The Faculty Practice Plan allows not only public sector specialists to see private patients, but also private sector specialists to practise in public hospitals. This will result in more opportunities for all doctors, and more doctors for both subsidised and private patients.

Night Clinics are opened to ensure that lower income Singaporeans will continue to have access to good and affordable primary healthcare. The



Left to right: Dr Yue Wai Mun, A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Mr Chan Soo Sen, Prof Low Cheng Hock, Dr Lim Teck Beng



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◀ Page 1 – “Let’s Work as a Team for Singaporeans”

Government will anyway stay within the 25% limit for polyclinics’ provision of overall primary healthcare services. This was stipulated in the 1993 White Paper on Affordable Healthcare, which continues to guide Ministry of Health’s work. So the polyclinics are not competing with the GPs. Indeed the polyclinics do not rule out the option of engaging some private GPs on mutually acceptable terms to reinforce their medical teams. Night Clinics can be a win-win arrangement for all parties.

I know the changes Ministry of Health introduced still disturb. However, I would like to assure you that Ministry of Health is not changing for the sake of changing. We are changing so that:

- Health services available to Singaporeans will continue to be good and accessible;

- Doctors are given more opportunities to develop professionally;
- Our healthcare programmes become more relevant and responsive to longer term trends, such as a more aged population society; and
- Healthcare remains affordable.

All doctors I talk to tell me, in different words, that medicine is first and foremost a caring profession. This is fundamental and will not change. A doctor must be someone who always puts the interests of his or her patient first, and is ready to lend a helping hand where it is needed. This is the core of your professional pride.

Our doctors and Ministry of Health share the same objective of setting up a good health and medical service to serve Singaporeans. If we have trust and confidence in each other and

work closely as a team, all will benefit. Singaporeans will live longer, healthier, and happier.

I have confidence in our doctors. The successful separation of the Siamese twins shows that Singaporean doctors can be at the forefront and cutting edge of their profession. I also have confidence in the Singapore Medical Association. You have established good networking amongst the doctors. You have also taken various steps to enhance the professionalism of the doctors. You have set up a Continuing Professional Development programme for doctors, a Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism, and issued practice-related advisory statements to help the doctors.

Continue with your good work. Ministry of Health shares your objective for public service and professional upgrading. Let’s work as a team for Singaporeans!” ■