

SMA 41st President Valedictory Address - 21 April 2001

By A/Professor Goh Lee Gan

THE YEAR PAST

In the year past, the three guideposts of empowerment, relationship building and proactive activities or ERP for short have again proved useful. The SMA Council has done a number of things. Suffice to say I am generally happy with the outcome of most of these things. I would just like to mention the activities that will be ongoing into the next Council.

- First, our Centre of Medical Ethics and Professionalism or CMEP got off with a flying start and our activities have attracted good turn-outs;
- Second, our SMA membership privilege services have taken off well too. We will have a lifestyle magazine and the SMA Life website to serve SMA members' lifestyle needs better.
- Third, our younger doctors are actively into programming palm-tops to receive medical information databases, lecture notes and other useful information for the doctor. We can look forward to have literally the world of medical information in our palms.
- Fourth, medico-legal activities have also occupied your Council's time. My Council and I would like to thank our panel of legal advisors for their unstinted contributions and good advice throughout the year. Let me thank Mr Lek Siang Peng, Dr Myint Soe, Mr Leo Fernando, Mr K Shanmugam and Mr Kumar Lal. I must also thank Dr Joanna Lin and Dr Lim Teck Beng, respectively the medical advisors to MPS and UMP.

INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

Insights

The advantage of being President is that one has a good vantage point of the way ahead. It is just like being the pilot in the cockpit. The task is to see the profession go down the right runway.

There are two important insights:

- The SMA needs to concentrate on empowerment of our doctors to practise

with confidence and without fear of errors and blackmail by unreasonable patients. We would need to set mechanisms to provide timely counsel to doctors in need of help. In all these proactive and empowerment activities we need to continue to work closely with SMC and various bodies in the Ministry of Health and also the public.

- On medical errors, we need to maintain the professional standard of care that the late Prof Chao Tzee Cheng spoke about as early as 1981. He said: "... Treat the patient with care, competence, skill and diligence; ensure that the patient is well looked after in his (the doctor's) absence by competent persons; and your patient will be grateful to you. Thus there is no fear of litigation against you."

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

There is no doubt that being President of the SMA is an important portfolio in public life. I must admit it can be stressful, particularly when events come thick and fast and you have to make uncomfortable judgment calls.

What have I learnt that can be passed to my good friend, Professor Low Cheng Hock? After all, the Presidency of the SMA is very much that of a baton relay. We must build on the successes and avoid the failures.

The following are to my mind, the important critical success factors:

- The first critical factor is to spend time and energy to build and maintain a strong SMA Secretariat team. This is the home team. I am indeed blessed to have a powerful and responsive SMA Secretariat under the leadership of Miss Chua Gek Eng that I inherited from A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean. He says that it was Dr Lim Teck Beng who helped him restructure it. I have certainly benefited. Under my term of office, we have built up IT capacity. I can confidently say that I am handing over to the new Council a powerful SMA Secretariat that I am really proud of.

- An equally important critical success factor is to entertain discussion at the Council level but to think very carefully before making important decisions. The President must choose as best a decision as he can. There will be some wise members in and out of the Council. It is wisdom to seek out such counsel. Of course, whatever is said and done, the President must sink or swim with what finally flows out of his pen.
- The third critical success factor is relationship building with the public, the profession, our politicians and the press. It will be a lifetime of perfection.
- The final critical success factor is the ability to recover should setbacks occur and to do better the next time around. Reflections and cognitive redefinition must be part and parcel of the President's survival package.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by thanking several groups of people once again. I must thank:

- Members of my Council with whom I have spent countless hours debating on the best runway to take;
- My SMA Secretariat as the great home team;
- The Ministry of Health for entertaining our ideas, concerns and expectations; thank you Soo Sen for accepting our invitation to be Guest-of-Honour and for your encouraging words;
- The membership for your social support; and
- Last but not least, our spouses and our employers for permission to spend time in the management of SMA's affairs. Thank you, one and all. ■



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