

# Surviving Managed Care

The SMA Centre for Medical Ethics & Professionalism (CMEP) is organising a series of Practice Management Seminars on a bi-yearly basis. The inaugural seminar was held earlier this year on 25 March. The topic then was "The Doctor as Manager". For those of you who attended that seminar, you would recall that we had a good turnout. I am pleased that the latest seminar "Surviving Managed Care" on 9 September continued to attract many members of our profession.

The medical profession is facing tremendous challenges today. These include ethical dilemmas in the context of an ever changing environment, rising

public expectations of medical care, increasing trends in medical litigations, business competition from various healthcare sources and last but not least, the challenges of coping with a Managed Care relationship.

In Managed Care, the physician is often locked in a relationship with 2 groups of entities. The first is the patient and his/her family and caregivers. The second is the group comprising managed care organisations, insurance companies and employers. In Managed Care, the physician has contractual obligations to fulfil as in any business relationship. At the same time, the doctor has to ensure that he or she practises ethically and

competently. There may be potential areas of conflicts of interests. How does the doctor reconcile these issues in his daily practice?

While physicians who are used to a pure fee-for-service model may dislike the Managed Care concept, there is no denying that Managed Care can help keep healthcare costs down by ensuring patients do not receive unnecessary care or care that is more expensive than it needs to be. Perhaps Managed Care can be looked upon as a response to the constraints and the needs of the society at large, where the individual needs of the patient are balanced in some way against the needs of the society. ■