

# Medical Hub Revisited

Singapore is one of the medical hubs in the Asia Pacific. The advantages that it enjoys are the central location, good travel network, good IT and good service infrastructure. Hitherto, the focus has been in the provision of tertiary medical services. Also, it has been largely private sector based. Our weaknesses are the high costs of living and services.

There is also a great need to be politically sensitive that Singapore does not incur the unhappiness of our fellow professionals in the neighbouring countries. They have levelled their fingers at Singapore doctors for undue advertising. Indeed there were formal complaints lodged with the Singapore Medical Association in the past by neighbouring medical associations that Singapore doctors and private hospitals advertised their medical services in the newspapers and the Yellow Pages of the

neighbouring countries. The complainants felt this was distasteful and unethical.

What lies ahead in Singapore continuing to be a sustainable medical hub? The answer is that we need to have a paradigm shift. We need to move beyond being a service hub alone to be a training cum service hub.

This paradigm shift has several advantages. First, training is a great professional relationship creator. The goodwill and mentorship will continue long after the training period is over. It is very likely that those who have been trained in Singapore and exposed to our healthcare services will look towards us if they need to refer their patients out of their countries; there will be no accusation of advertising.

Second, by being involved in training we could function as part of a network for training with other institutions around the world. Many countries are looking

into the Asia Pacific and linking them with countries in the region to deliver their training programmes. We could be their offshore training site, just like other countries in the region.

Thirdly, training is the best way to keep abreast of services. Unless we keep abreast, we will lose our attraction.

The way ahead for Singapore then is to review and build our professional capacity to provide training both bilaterally as part of a training network as well as to revisit our provision of healthcare services to see how we could keep them affordable for our overseas patients. We would also need to build capacity in our service infrastructure.

There is also a need for the public sector to involve the private sector as partners in the training and service hub. Only then could we have optimised our strengths as a medical hub in the region. ■