

SMA Hosts the 10th MASEAN Mid-Term Meeting in Singapore

Reported by A/Prof Cheong Pak Yeon (MASEAN Secretary General, until 8 Nov 2002)



Delegates at the 10th MASEAN Mid-Term Meeting

The Singapore Medical Association (SMA) had the honour of hosting the 10th Mid-Term Meeting of the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations (MASEAN), which was held from 8 - 9 November 2002 at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel. The theme this year was "Medical Ethics and Professionalism in ASEAN". The Mid-Term Meeting was held in conjunction with the SMA 6th Annual Ethics Convention. (See page 10 for the report.)

We were joined by both our local and overseas colleagues, the latter from the medical associations of Cambodia, Indonesian, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

OPENING CEREMONY

Prof Low Cheng Hock, President of SMA, welcomed all MASEAN delegates to Singapore and delivered the Opening Address. Prof Low said that strong medical associations in ASEAN are needed, to cooperate and work together to promote professionalism and ethics, and enhance the art of medical practice.

Prof Sau Sok Khonn, Chairman of MASEAN and President of the Cambodian Medical Association (CMA), addressed

and welcomed the delegates next. He expressed his full support for this year's theme, and believed that the meeting would provide participants with opportunities to exchange valuable experiences.

The Guest-of-Honour, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Minister of State for Health and Environment, extended a warm welcome to all delegates. In his address, Dr Balaji spoke on the key changes in the healthcare sector that have the greatest potential impact on medical professionalism and the nature of the doctor-patient relationship.

Firstly, the concern in nearly all countries about spiralling and unsustainable increases in healthcare costs has resulted in the introduction of numerous initiatives and mechanisms aimed at cost containment.

Secondly, with the increasing level of education of patients and the ready availability of up-to-date medical information through the Internet, doctors may also be increasingly faced with the difficult task of balancing the delivery of cost-effective treatment with rising patient expectations.

Thirdly, doctors and medical professionals need to keep up with the rapid advances in medical science and

practice. They also need to make their patients understand that not all medical information is applicable and appropriate for all situations.

BUSINESS MEETINGS

A/Prof Cheong Pak Yeon, Secretary General of MASEAN, announced that he would be handing over his post to Dr Wong Chiang Yin, 2nd Vice President of SMA. Dr Wong accepted the post and noted that under A/Prof Cheong's guidance, the MASEAN Secretariat's operations have been running efficiently since 1995.

The meeting continued with a report by the Chairman of the Taskforce on GATS & AFAS, and country reports from the MASEAN member associations. (See side box for highlights.)

The Indonesian Medical Association also reported on its preparations for the hosting of the 11th MASEAN Conference in Bali, from 12 - 13 December 2003. The theme for next year will centre on family physicians.

MEETING OF THE ETHICS CHAIRMEN

The session was chaired by Dr T. Thirumoorthy, Director of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism. Dr Thirumoorthy started the session by presenting the lead paper on "The Evolution of Ethics in SMA". This was followed by country reports from the medical associations of Malaysia and Thailand on "The Problems and Areas of Common Cooperation in Ethical Issues".

MASEAN DINNER

The MASEAN Dinner was held on 9 November 2002. The Guest-of-Honour was Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health.

In his address, Prof Tan said that to maintain and strengthen the trust and the special nature of the doctor-patient relationship, the profession needs to continue to focus on two key areas.

Firstly, patients must have confidence that their doctors are keeping abreast of changes and practising good and up-to-date medicine. Hence, the Singapore Medical Council has made continuing medical education a mandatory requirement for all doctors practising in Singapore from 2003.

Secondly, there is a need to articulate clearly and simply, the key concepts and



From left to right: Dr Lee Suan Yew (President, Singapore Medical Council), Datuk Dr P. Krishnan (President, Commonwealth Medical Association), Prof Low Cheng Hock (President, SMA), Prof Tan Chorh Chuan (Guest-of-Honour)

principles of medical ethics, and to find ways to apply them, and make them relevant, to daily clinical practice.

During the second half of the MASEAN Dinner, the SMA CMEP was officially launched, together with its first publication “Medical Malpractice in Singapore”. (See page 12 for a report.) Autographed copies were presented to all the dinner guests.



From left to right: Dr Wong Chiang Yin, A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COUNTRY REPORTS

(Note: The full reports are available on the MASEAN website at <http://www.masean.org>)

TASKFORCE ON GATS & AFAS:

Although the implementation of AFTA has been postponed to 2005, MASEAN member associations were urged to start planning for the implementation of AFTA, and to find common grounds. The meeting also agreed that the MASEAN Secretariat would submit the MASEAN-AFTA paper to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, and to seek an audience at its next meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2003.

CAMBODIA

At its 6th Annual Meeting, it was recommended that the new Council of the Cambodian Medical Association (CMA) set up a sub-committee to prepare a draft to amend some articles of the CMA statute, according to the harmonisation of the cultural and socio-economic situation in Cambodia and the region.

MALAYSIA

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), had many meetings with the various ministries and external organisations, to help solve problems faced by the profession.

The MMA, through its Penang Branch, hosted the 19th Triennial Conference of the Commonwealth Medical Association (CMA) on “Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Developing Countries”, and the joint Commonwealth Medical Association Trust and MMA Workshop on “Human Rights and Medical Ethics”. Datuk Dr P. Krishnan, MMA’s Immediate Past President, was also installed as the President of the CMA.

MYANMAR

Professor Mya Tu’s Oration on “Humanism and Ethics in Medical Practice, Health Services, Medical Education and Medical Research” was distributed at the 1st Myanmar Academy of Medical Science Oration, to all delegates attending the 48th Myanmar Medical Conference.

SINGAPORE

One of the more pressing issues involved the provisional liquidation of the United Medical Protection (UMP), an Australian-based mutual medical indemnity provider, which covers more than 30% of the medical profession in Singapore. The SMA continues to monitor the situation in Australia, make representations to UMP Australia and the Singapore government, as well as to update members on the situation.

The SMA Ethics Committee also formed a workgroup on “Avoid Medical Accidents – Improve Patient Information” (AMA-IPI), to address the rising number of claims of large amounts reported in the local press, the perceived need for reform, and to deal with the root causes of medical litigation and complaints.

THAILAND

The Medical Association of Thailand participated in and sponsored the “Ethics of Medical Students” project, which was aimed at training medical students how to adjust and develop ethical practice. The Ethics Committee also published a textbook on “Medical Ethics” for medical students, which has been distributed all over the country since 2000.

VIETNAM

Founded in 1955, the membership of the Vietnam General Association of Medicine and Pharmacy (VGAMP), which numbered only 200 on the day of its foundation, has now reached a total of over 60,000. ■