

SMA Medical & Ethics Convention 2003

Reported by Dr Tan Kok Leong and Dr Chin Jing Jih, Chairmen of the Medical and Ethics Convention Organising Committees respectively.

The SMA Medical & Ethics Convention 2003 was held on the weekend of 1 and 2 November at the Suntec International Convention and Exhibition Centre (SICEC).

JUDICIOUS APPROACH IN MEDICAL PRACTICE

"We need to conduct ourselves in an orderly fashion like the penguins. But we also need a few peacocks, who are flashy, colourful and flamboyant with lots of exuberance. Our society needs the many penguins to adopt some good peacock-like characteristics but society also needs a few peacocks to acquire some virtues of the penguins! This way, Singapore will have a well-balanced breed of excellent doctors."

Those were the concluding remarks of this year's SMA Lecturer, Dr Lee Suan Yew, who is also President of the Singapore Medical Council.

More than 180 doctors and allied healthcare professionals gathered at SICEC on Saturday, 1 November 2003, for the SMA Lecture 2003 on 'Judicious Approach in Medical Practice'.

Dr Lee's lecture dealt with the importance of a judicious approach in medical practice in relation to patient management, community interaction and the institutional setting. The full text will be published in a later issue of the Singapore Medical Journal. (See front page for highlights of the lecture.)

MEDICAL RECORDS & PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Following the SMA Lecture was a symposium that aimed to highlight practical aspects of maintaining medical records and patient confidentiality.

The first speaker, Dr Jason Yap, talked about legal and ethical responsibilities, and potential pitfalls when using IT technologies such as the internet and electronic mail to communicate with patients and one another. Dr Yap is currently the Director for Corporate Services in the IT Division of the National Healthcare Group.

The second speaker, Mr Leo Fernando, provided information on the instances and the extent to which doctors are compelled to give patient information to law enforcement officers without the patient's consent. Mr Fernando has been in active practice for almost 35 years, primarily in the area of criminal law, and has extensive experience and knowledge in this field. He is also an SMA Honorary Legal Adviser.

Management of medical records is a very important medico-legal and professional duty of doctors. The last speaker, Dr Tham Tat Yean, SMA Honorary Secretary and Managing Director of a private group practice, shared with participants some useful advice on the maintenance, ownership and access to medical records.

HOME HEALTHCARE

The symposium on home healthcare was jointly organised with the College of Family Physicians, Singapore, and supported by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community Development and Sports.

The Minister of State for Health and Transport, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, in his keynote speech, highlighted that home healthcare is becoming increasingly important in Singapore, as the population of those aged 60 years and above is estimated to increase from 11% to 27% by year 2030. In response to a query on the allocation of budget for home healthcare services, Dr Balaji clarified that the budget is expected to increase proportionately with the rising need for such services.

Ms Susan Mende, Chief Operating Officer of the Tsao Foundation, gave an insight to the future of home care in Singapore. The basic support components, such as dedicated home care teams and care management services, are already in place. General practitioners are expected to play an increasingly central and expanded role in the future. However,



The panel shares a lighter moment with the audience. (From left to right) A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, Mr Leo Fernando, Dr Tham Tat Yean and Dr Jason Yap.



Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Guest-of-Honour for the Medical Convention on Home Healthcare.



Dr Tan Kok Leong presents Dr Ong Hian Tat with a token of appreciation.

the development of a home care system would face many challenges, such as funding, training, and political will.

Three other distinguished speakers provided practical tips on the management of disabilities across the age groups.

Dr Ong Hian Tat, a Paediatric Consultant in the National University Hospital shared with participants on the common paediatric conditions associated with significant physical disabilities, and the ambulatory aids and devices that are available locally and overseas. Dr Ong also volunteers at several welfare organisations, such as the Spastic Children's Association of Singapore and Muscular Dystrophy Association of Singapore.

Caring for young adults with disabilities requires a holistic approach. "Try to put ourselves in their shoes; it is not something that can be taken care of simply by writing a prescription," said the second speaker, Dr Sherry Young, a Consultant in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH). Dr Young highlighted the need to develop services to help this group of people reintegrate and become productive members of society again.

The last speaker, Dr Tham Weng Yew, Medical Director of Code 4 Medical Services, talked about the challenges in providing home care for the elderly, which include forming participative partnerships with the elderly patients and their caregivers, and end of life issues such as advanced planning and palliative care.

MEDICAL PROFESSION & PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

"Doctors and drug companies must work together, but doctors do not need to be banqueted, transported in luxury, put up in the best hotels, and educated by drug companies." (*Editorial, British Medical Journal, 2003;326: 12155-6.*)

The objective of this symposium was to discuss how an ethical and professional partnership can be achieved between the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry.

Although the turn-out for this event was not as we had hoped, the 30 to 40 people in attendance was a casual setting for open and honest discussion among the doctors and members from the pharmaceutical industry.

The first speaker, Dr Chow Weng-Ho, who represented the Singapore Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (SAPI), gave a perspective on the role and accountability of the pharmaceutical industry. The SAPI Code of Marketing Practices, which governs the promotion of medicinal products, was discussed. Dr Chow is a medical doctor and is presently working at GlaxoSmithKline as Regional Medical Affairs Manager. He is also a member of the SAPI Marketing Practices Committee.

Dr Suresh Sahadevan, a member of the Ethics Committees in TTSH and SMA, provided an insight to the ethical dilemmas of the partnership at the individual and organisational level, which are commonly associated with sponsorship of gifts, hospitality, and drug-sponsored research and continued medical education.

The last speaker, Dr Thirumoorthy, Immediate Past Director of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism, elaborated on the standards of conduct in the joint paper by SMA and SAPI, which was published in 1998.



Dr Chin Jing Jih thanks Dr Chow Weng-Ho for his presentation on the pharmaceutical industry.

WORD OF THANKS

The Organising Committee is deeply grateful to all speakers for their time and participation; NHG and SingHealth for their continuous support; and the SMA Secretariat for their hard work and diligence. We look forward to preparing a better programme for you next year. ■