

# SMA 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Ethics Convention

By Dr Chin Jing Jih, Organising Chairman



The panel fields questions on the medical chaperon's role. (From left to right) Dr Tan See Leng, Dr T Thirumoorthy and Mr Leslie Chew.

The SMA 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Ethics Convention was held on 23 and 24 October 2004. As with past years, the Convention comprised the SMA annual lectureship and various ethics symposiums. The first day was held at the M-Hotel and the following day was over at the Alumni Auditorium.

## SMA LECTURE 2004

The Convention kicked off with the SMA's prestigious Annual Lectureship by Professor Raj Mohan Nambiar who spoke on Professional Development. He started with the historical evolution of professionalism, and cited Hippocratic Oaths around the world. Indeed, serving humanity justly, improving medical knowledge, assuring physician competence, maintaining confidentiality and protecting patient vulnerability, are important obligations that appear in all the modifications of the Hippocratic Oath. He went on to describe how changes in healthcare delivery have altered medical professionalism and practice, and examined worldwide efforts in promoting professional development as a lifelong approach to learning. Prof Nambiar further presented the roles of the individual doctor, professional bodies and institutions in enhancing professionalism, and finally summarised the lessons learnt and steps we can take in enhancing professional development in Singapore. The lecture was certainly enlightening in more ways than expected.

Prior to the lecture was a fascinating citation of Prof Nambiar, presented by Prof Low Cheng Hock who talked about the man being his mentor and a great friend of 30 years.

## THE MEDICAL CHAPERON

The second half of the programme was a practice management symposium, which discussed ethical and legal issues concerning physical examination and role of the chaperon.

Dr T Thirumoorthy, chairperson for the session, began with some case studies which had been dealt with by the SMA Ethics Committee, and gave an overview of the professional issues in medical examinations. Mr Leslie Chew, Senior Counsel and Managing Partner of KhattarWong, highlighted that having a chaperon is essential not only for the patient but also for the doctor. Dr Tan See Leng, Chief Operating Officer of Mount Elizabeth Hospital and Council Member of the College of Family Physicians, gave practical tips on how and when to engage a chaperon. The session ended with an interactive panel discussion with the audience.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The morning of the second day started with Dr Wong Chiang Yin, Second Vice President of SMA and Chairman of the SMA Complaints Committee, welcoming all who were present to a symposium to discuss the various ways of resolving conflicts arising from patient dissatisfaction, both from the perspective of improving doctor-patient relationship as well as risk management. Dr Wong presented an analysis of 272 complaints against doctors made over a period of three years from 1995 to 1998 to the SMA Ethics Committee. As the four most common categories of complaints constituted 66.8% of all cases, he urged that any serious efforts to study ways and means of reducing complaint occurrences should be focused on these four categories: Overcharging, Wrong Diagnosis, Doctor Having Poor Attitude and Wrong / Over-treatment.

Both doctors and patients want to understand and be understood, as put forward by A/Prof Calvin Fones, Head of the Psychology Medicine Department, National University of Singapore, as he discussed ways to achieving good doctor-patient communication.

The possible role of mediation as an option to resolving doctor-patient disputes was discussed comprehensively by

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Mr Loong Seng Onn, Executive Director of the Singapore Mediation Centre. He highlighted the benefits of mediation, and the functions of Singapore Mediation Centre which has so far achieved a success rate of 91.67% in medical disputes. More information on the procedure and cost can be obtained from their website <http://www.mediation.com.sg>

The session ended with a lunch buffet at the newly opened Soteria Café.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

After lunch, Dr Jason Yap Chin Huat, Chairperson for the afternoon, gave a quick overview of the session, which aimed to explore the potential conflicts of interest faced by members of the medical profession, specifically doctors, researchers and academicians. A/Prof Paul Tambyah, Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore, kicked

off the session to discuss the conflicts of interest and commitment faced by a doctor in academic practice. Dr Tan Poh Kiang, a general practitioner in private practice, shared his views on doctors' involvement in MLM, aesthetic therapies, managed healthcare, pharmaceutical firms, and treating patients within one's core competency. The final speaker for the day was Dr Toh Han Chong who gave an insight to the conflicts of interest surrounding the dual role of a physician and clinical researcher.

#### WORD OF THANKS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all the speakers for their invaluable time and effort, which made our convention a success.

We look forward to another fruitful Ethics Convention in the coming years as we reaffirm the central role of ethics and professionalism in the practice of medicine. ■



(From left to right) Dr Wong Tien Hua, Dr Soh Wah Ngee, Prof Raj Nambiar, Dr Lee Pheng Soon, Dr Wong Chiang Yin and Dr Raymond Chua.