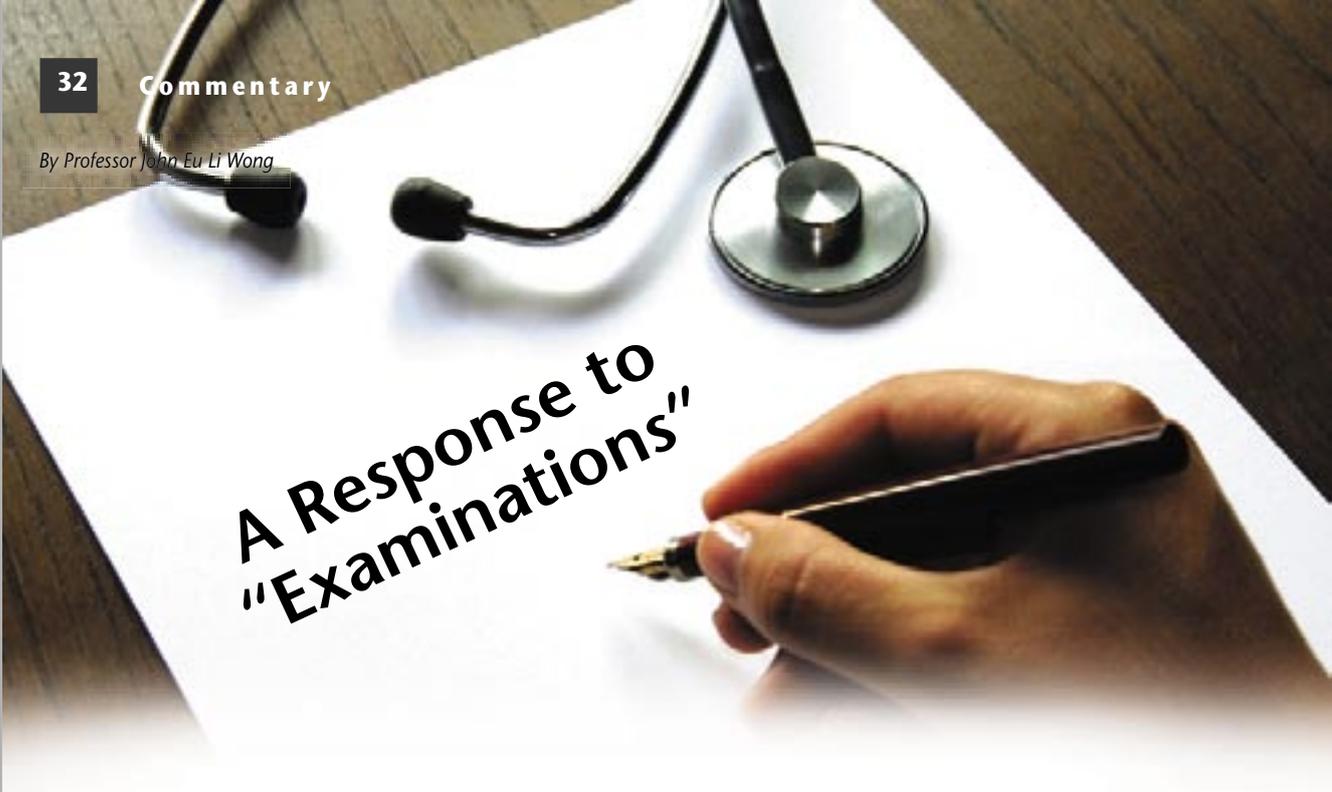


By Professor John Eu Li Wong



A Response to "Examinations"

We thank the Editor, *SMA News* for the opportunity to comment on the article by Dr Teo Jin Yao entitled "Examinations".

The issues that Dr Teo raises are the very ones that the School has been actively working on. For example, the issue of "too frequent assessments" has already been addressed in partnership with the student body. It is through these efforts and working with student leaders that we are able to achieve our educational outcomes and give students sufficient time for extra-curricular activities which are an integral component of medical education. Many of Dr Teo's peers are active sportsmen and sportswomen, with some even representing Singapore internationally. Several are also active in civic and religious organisations. Many others find time to be involved in biomedical research outside of their classroom and ward activities.

While we appreciate that what Dr Teo experienced in his pass/fail Viva was not a pleasant one, it does not change the fact that he may be academically weak for that part of the examination. The Final MBBS Examination is a graduating as well as an accrediting examination. As such we do hold candidates up to a high level of scrutiny in order to ensure basic competency criteria are met to become a safe House Officer. It should be stressed that Dr Teo is still under training as a House Officer, and that he and his classmates will not be fully registered to practise Medicine in Singapore until the satisfactory completion of this year of further training.

During the Final Year Examination, if there is uncertainty about the candidate's competency for any reason, the candidate will certainly be called

up for a Viva. If the particular area is indeed an anomaly, the candidate should pass with ease. Candidates must understand that examiners have to be comfortable about their overall competency. In clinical life, there is often no "second chance" if a mistake is made. A Viva for a candidate who has made a mistake in a single area is thus more "generous" than what would happen in real life.

We are continuously striving for better reliability in our assessment tools. We are working with international experts to take into account the merits of both a longitudinal process as well as the need for "high stakes" examinations. This is found in the best medical schools overseas.

We would like to share with your readers that we have introduced a more structured and standardised way of using Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) in the Final Year, as well as a Student Internship Programme prior to being allowed to sit the Final Examination. The School has also initiated a formal training programme for examiners to enhance the reliability of our assessments.

The Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine's responsibility is to produce competent doctors to meet Singapore's current and future needs. We are greatly encouraged by the contributions of young graduates and current medical students who serve on our education task force. Despite our long history and reputation of producing many of Asia's leading doctors, we have no intention of being complacent and will continue to evaluate and refine our curriculum and assessment procedures to meet the demands of modern medicine. ■

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