



24 February 2024

SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

The SMC held its first Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony this year on 24 February. The event, which was held at the College of Medicine Building, Ministry of Health, saw 217 provisionally- and conditionally-registered doctors taking the Pledge. During the Pledge Ceremony, doctors were reminded of their responsibilities to their patients as well as the importance of upholding high professional and ethical standards.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Health) Mdm Rahayu Mahzam was the Guest-of-Honour for the event. Invited guests included representatives of the medical professional bodies and Medical Boards of hospitals.



Speech by Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Health) Mdm Rahayu Mahzam

I am pleased to join you at the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony this afternoon. The Physician Pledge represents a significant milestone in your professional journey. The oath that you will be taking reaffirms the values at the heart of the medical profession – dedication, integrity, and respect. It also underscores your unwavering dedication to provide patient-centred care within our evolving healthcare landscape.

You join the ranks of Singapore's medical fraternity at an important juncture, as we just launched Healthier SG last year. Healthier SG aims to enhance the nation's health and well-being by placing a stronger emphasis on preventive care.

Healthier SG therefore seeks to reduce the burden of chronic diseases and ensure a higher quality of life for all Singaporeans. It underscores our commitment to building a resilient and sustainable healthcare system.

But how does Healthier SG impact on your role as physicians administering patient-centred care? Patient-centred care focuses on the patients, respecting their preferences, needs and values and getting them more involved when making clinical decisions. It goes beyond treating them when they are unwell. Under Healthier SG, all of you have a role to play. Doctors can play a crucial role in preventive care by promoting healthy lifestyles and timely screening or vaccinations or simply encouraging your patients to enrol with a Healthier SG clinic. Besides physical well-being, it is also important to consider the emotional and social needs of your patients. Therefore, we must consider initiatives and programmes that support mental well-being and encourage activities that bring about social interaction. Your unwavering commitment to these principles will play a crucial role in the success of Healthier SG, as we work together towards improving the health and wellbeing of Singaporeans.

I want to make the point that you are not alone in the path you have chosen to practise medicine in Singapore. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and SMC are committed to support you in your professional journey, where we have developed career pathways to support your professional aspirations. Be open to explore these career options. You can be a Healthier SG Champion by becoming a Family Physician in the primary care sector, or a specialist in public hospitals. If you enjoy the challenges of broad-based clinical care in a hospital setting, you can also consider training to become a Hospital Clinician.

MOHH and the various public healthcare institutions are committed to provide you with the necessary information on career options to support you in making well-informed career choices.



The oath [...] reaffirms the values at the heart of the medical profession – dedication, integrity, and respect.

As professionals, you commit to consistently enhance your knowledge and skills. This involves ongoing education to stay abreast of the latest advancements in medicine and healthcare. The Singapore Medical Association (SMA), College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and the Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS) are important providers of continuing medical education. These organisations also provide a platform and valuable opportunities for you to interact with and glean valuable insights from your peers and seasoned medical professionals.

However, the practice of medicine goes beyond acquiring knowledge, competencies, and skills. At the heart of it, doctors must uphold integrity and practice in an ethical and responsible manner. There are recent initiatives from SMC aimed at promoting ethical behavior, awareness, and professionalism within the medical profession. One such example is the introduction of the mandatory Medical Ethics core points requirement as mentioned by Professor Chee Yam Cheng earlier in his speech.

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Doctors intending to renew their practicing certificate from 2026 must ensure they start accumulating Continuing Medical Education (CME) core points in Medical Ethics from this year. This aims to help doctors understand and become more familiar with the SMC Ethical Code and the Ethical Guidelines.

To better support you in providing appropriate clinical care for your patients, I encourage you to take reference from the ACE Clinical Guidances (ACGs) developed by MOH's Agency for Care Effectiveness. These ACGs provide concise evidence-based recommendations to inform clinical practice and support shared decision-making. ACGs cover a range of common clinical conditions encountered in both chronic and acute care that are tailored to the Singapore context by addressing local care needs, using local studies or data where available, and taking into account local policies, care pathways, and availability of treatments. Additionally, you can also accrue CME points for reading the ACGs.

No man is an island. The delivery of high-quality healthcare services requires collaborative teamwork with colleagues from other healthcare professions. In our daily responsibilities, it is crucial to actively cultivate a cooperative and supportive environment with all healthcare professionals. This begins by recognising, respecting, and appreciating the contributions of not only fellow doctors but also the entire team of nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, and other ancillary

workers. By leveraging on the collective expertise and perspectives of each member, we can then deliver effective and appropriate care for our nation's health.

Lastly, doctoring is a demanding career. Amidst your busy schedule, do take time to prioritise yourselves. Pay attention to your physical, mental, and social health. Maintain your personal resilience and it will translate into better care for the patients that you see.

In closing, congratulations to all of you in reaching this milestone and I wish you a successful and fulfilling career ahead.

Thank you.



Speech by Professor Chee Yam Cheng

President of SMC

Today is the last day of the lunar New Year celebrations, a very good afternoon and happy Chap Goh Meh. On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I warmly welcome and thank our Guest-of-Honour, Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, our Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health, our distinguished guests and the more than 200 colleagues taking the Physician's Pledge today for your presence.

The Physician's Pledge

Standing here today brings back the memory of medical school days for those of us who are old enough to have studied in this building before. Where I stand and where you are sitting was the medical library where many days and hours were spent by many doctors in Singapore reading, studying and resting. But at the heart of academic and professional pursuits is conducting oneself with integrity and with high standards of professionalism beginning as medical students and going on as doctors. This is considered so integral and important that the Pledge you recite today is written into the Second Schedule of the Medical Registration Regulations or MRR in short. Section 16 of the MRR requires all doctors who wish to be fully registered with the SMC to take the Physician's Pledge.

In a famous case of a failed appeal by a well-known doctor to the High Court, the High Court in Singapore observed that the Physician's Pledge is not just mere rhetoric; it shows that the spirit of public service and the existence of ethical obligations underpin the practice of medicine. As society collectively entrusts doctors with its members' health, wellbeing and lives, patients and societies at large expect doctors to be responsible, and to maintain the highest standards of professional practice and conduct.

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The Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines

Integrity, ethics and professionalism are indeed the foundation and pillars of our profession. The Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines or ECEG was published by the Medical Council for all doctors to



internalise into our conduct and practice. It is not onerous to read in one sitting and it is eminently advisable to familiarise oneself with the ECEG. After you have done so, you would still have to refer to it from time to time and to consult it when you face ethical and professional decisions in your practice. For more guidance in any particular area, you should also refer to the accompanying Handbook on Medical Ethics for the detailed explanations on a particular code or guideline.

Compulsory CME on Mandatory Medical Ethics for all doctors

To ensure that doctors are familiar with and are up to date on ethical issues and best practices, the Continuing Medical Education (CME) on Medical Ethics was made mandatory for doctors starting from those who renewed their practising certificate this year. This was recommended by the MOH Workgroup which reviewed the taking of Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process. Let me quote from Recommendation 10 of the Workgroup's Report. "Currently, there is a low take-up rate for medical education on medical ethics for the general population of doctors as such courses are not compulsory. Core points for CME are only awarded for clinical updates within the specialty. There is a need to increase

awareness of ethical issues and developments, such as informed consent, throughout the medical profession, as these developments can have a significant impact on the practice of medicine. Mandating that doctors update themselves on these issues will ensure that they are exposed to a baseline level of knowledge on the applicable legal standards in practice that will allow them to practice effectively.”

You would have just received a circular from SMC on 31 January to remind doctors concerning this Mandatory Medical Ethics or MME core points in our doctors’ CME. Registered doctors must obtain the minimum Mandatory Medical Ethics core points before they can renew their practising certificates (PCs) from 2026 onwards. Hence our doctors will have to start accumulating their MME points from this year onwards. The Council is grateful to have the partnership of the three medical professional bodies, namely, the Academy of Medicine Singapore, the College of Family Physicians Singapore and the Singapore Medical Association who have worked hard to develop a systematic Medical Ethics curriculum. The curriculum will cover four fundamental core topics: a) Professionalism; b) Ethics; c) Informed Consent and Medical Decision Making; and d) Medical Records, Privacy and Confidentiality.

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Series in Professional Ethics

The Council is also running a series on professional ethics in the regular SMC e-newsletters which are also available through the SMC website. You can read about important issues which SMC often deals with in the complaints and disciplinary processes. Such issues include propriety and sexual boundaries in a doctor's practice or personal conduct and the proper prescribing of hypnotics and benzodiazepines and codeine containing cough mixtures which are addictive drugs.

You would also have received regular emails from the SMC. Please pay attention to them. To be practical, if your emails are clogged up with too many emails from important and unimportant sources, you may want to have a different email address reserved for those from important sources and organisations like the SMC. This will give you the alerts that requires your attention for matters like renewing your practising certificates, important announcements like mandatory medical ethics, or reminders to take part in the compulsory election of the 'elected Council members'. SMC also sends a newsletter which it publishes every 4 months. The newsletter strives to be useful for all doctors and contains articles and announcements of interest. You may even find yourself in the next issue, in the photos taken today.



Conclusion

Colleagues, let us take a moment of introspection and reflection to think about our future. I quote some parts of the Pledge here. Will we dedicate our life to the service of humanity, practise our profession with conscience and dignity, make the health of our patients our first consideration and comply with the provisions of the Ethical Code? Will we constantly strive to add to our knowledge and skill? Or on the flip side, will some live only for their own benefit - selfishly, practising without conscience, without knowing the provisions of the ethical code, without the dignity of professionalism? Will behaviours be inappropriate and skills and knowledge deficient? We sincerely hope this will never be the case with you.

Our hope is that all of you here, will continue to be ethical, compassionate and professional. Let me extend my sincerest wishes for your success, and continued dedication of your lives to the service of humanity. Thank you and may you always benefit from a lifetime of good medical practice.