



# SMC

## NEWSLETTER



*In this issue —*

- **SMC Pledge Sep 2023 with Highlights of Minister's Speech**
- ***Series in Professional Ethics: Overview of Interim Orders Committee (IOC) and Interim Orders***
- **Practising Certificate Renewal 2023 Reminder**

*...and more*

# CONTENTS



**2** SMC President's Message

**4** SMC Pledge Sep 2023 with  
Highlights of Minister's Speech

**13** SMC's Response to the Straits  
Times Commentary

**15** *Series in Professional Ethics:*  
Overview of Interim Orders  
Committee (IOC) and Interim  
Orders

**18** Practising Certificate Renewal  
2023 Reminder



## SMC President's Message



*D*ear colleagues,

Season's greetings as we draw near to the end of 2023 and welcome the new year..



### Minister's Address at the Pledge Ceremony

At our second SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony in September this year, 526 doctors took the Pledge. We thank Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health for delivering his address to the doctors. In his address, he noted that the demographics and needs of society are changing and the medical fields are constantly evolving. As doctors, we should pursue continuing medical education meaningfully to help us keep abreast of the latest knowledge for our practice.

Minister Masagos also announced that to sustain the quality of postgraduate medical education in Singapore, MOH has developed Singapore's own accreditation framework called the Accreditation of Postgraduate Medical Education Singapore (APMES) to accredit postgraduate medical training programmes. Together with the development of local standards, these moves will further contextualise clinical training and ensure that postgraduate medical training programmes meet our high standards, training doctors to deliver quality healthcare for Singaporeans.

As we transition to APMES, MOH is also introducing competency-based medical education through the implementation of Entrustable Professional Activities or EPAs. These EPAs provide clear definitions of competencies that medical professionals must achieve at different stages of their training and the corresponding assessments are carefully selected for alignment to training outcomes. The aim is to foster a more learner-centred environment and facilitate timely feedback, ultimately supporting the development of trainees into family physicians, hospital clinicians and specialists.

### SMC's Response to the Straits Times Commentary

SMC's response to a commentary in the Straits Times in October 2023, "*Complaints against docs still take years to address, despite moves to speed things up*" is also published on our website. Complaints filed after 1 July 2022 are subject to the new processes under the amended Medical Registration Act (MRA).

Following all these measures, 70 per cent of complaints lodged in 2022 were concluded within a year versus 23 per cent in 2018. Of these, more than one-third of the 53 complaints received last year were concluded by the Inquiry Committees (ICs) within two months.

Some disciplinary inquiries take longer to conclude as the cases are more complex and may require input from expert witnesses. Other cases are subject to the completion of ongoing court proceedings, coroner's inquiries or police investigations before the disciplinary inquiries can continue. Procedural challenges and applications by respondent doctors to extend the time allocated to submit their defence further introduce delays to disciplinary proceedings

### **Series in Professional Ethics – Overview of Interim Orders Committee and Interim Orders**

In the August 2022 edition of the SMC Newsletter, we shared information on Interim Orders (IOs) and the Interim Orders Committee (IOC). An IO serves to protect members of the public and the public interest prior to the conclusion of substantive disciplinary proceedings against a registered medical practitioner. In this issue, we provide further clarifications on the IOs and the IOC.

### **PC Renewal**

We note that some doctors had encountered issues for the Practising Certificate (PC) renewal in October 2023. These issues have been rectified and we apologise for any inconvenience caused.

### **SMC's Announcements**

Please refer to SMC's latest announcements online, to keep abreast of the latest publications and news in SMC.

On behalf of the Council, I would like to wish all colleagues a happy and healthy new year ahead.

**Professor Chee Yam Cheng**  
**President**



# SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

23 September 2023



The SMC held its second Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony this year on 23 September.

The event, which was held at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore, saw 526 provisionally- and conditionally-registered doctors taking the Pledge.

By taking the Physician's oath, doctors were reminded of their responsibilities to their patients as well as the importance of upholding high professional and ethical standards in their practice.

During the Ceremony, 10 doctors who successfully completed their Postgraduate Year 1 (PGY1) training in 2022 received the MOH National Outstanding PGY1 Award.

These recipients had demonstrated consistent outstanding performance throughout their PGY1 training and displayed exemplary attributes of a doctor such as leadership and professionalism.

The SMC was honoured to have Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health as the Guest-of-Honour for the event, as well as members of the Medical Council and invited guests from the medical professional bodies and Chairmen of Medical Boards of hospitals.

## Speech by Guest of Honour Mr Masagos Zulkifli

Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health

I am pleased to join you for this afternoon's Ceremony. We are gathered today to mark a significant milestone in your journey as doctors, as you take the Singapore Medical Council Physician's Pledge.

We come together and witness each solemn commitment to uphold the values that are core to the medical profession - dedication, integrity, and respect.

Many members of the profession, who are here with us today, displayed these values during our fight against COVID-19.

It was not easy, but they displayed professionalism, dedication, and grit. To these doctors, thank you for keeping Singapore and Singaporeans safe.

Before the taking of the pledge, I would like to share a few thoughts.

First, be dedicated in serving your patients, doing what it takes to support their health.

This means being adaptable and responding to the needs of our population. As many of you already know, Singapore is a rapidly ageing society.



By 2026, one in five Singaporeans will be aged 65 and above. In addition, like many developed countries, there is a rising prevalence of chronic diseases.

Therefore, we must not only be equipped to put out fires, we must also prevent fires from occurring in the first place.

This is why as a nation, we are shifting our focus from curative care to preventive health, through Healthier SG.

As medical professionals, each of you play an important role in HealthierSG.

Whichever career pathway you choose to take, whether you are a family physician in the primary care sector, a hospital clinician, or a specialist.

HealthierSG is a national strategy to transform our healthcare system but more importantly, it is a shift in our ways of seeing and practicing healthcare.

Second, constantly strive to add to your knowledge and skill, and pursue excellence.

While many of you have gone through the rigor of a medical programme, never stop learning. The demographics and needs of society are changing.

The medical fields you are in are constantly evolving. Pursue continuing medical education meaningfully, and it will help you keep abreast of the latest knowledge and inform your practice.



I am glad that professional bodies like the Singapore Medical Association, College of Family Physicians Singapore and the Academy of Medicine Singapore are providing courses for CME, and also continue to foster knowledge sharing and opportunities for collaboration.

More than a decade ago, we introduced structured postgraduate medical training through residency programmes.

***The trust that you build with your patients enables you to partner with them to improve their health and well-being. Never take this trust for granted. Strive towards excellence, serve your patients with care, and uphold high standards of professional practice and conduct.***

These programmes have undoubtedly borne fruit, equipping our system with a structure to train doctors, and enriching our doctors with invaluable knowledge and clinical expertise.

To sustain the quality of postgraduate medical education in Singapore, we have developed our very own accreditation framework to accredit postgraduate medical training programmes.

Together with the development of local standards, these moves will further contextualise clinical training and ensure that postgraduate medical training programmes meets our high standards, training doctors to deliver quality healthcare for Singaporeans.

I'm pleased to announce the establishment of this framework, which is called the Accreditation of Postgraduate Medical Education Singapore or APMES.

As we transition to APMES, we are also introducing competency-based medical education through the implementation of Entrustable Professional Activities or EPAs. These EPAs provide clear definitions of competencies that medical professionals must achieve at different stages of their training and the corresponding assessments are carefully selected for alignment to training outcomes.





The aim is to foster a more learner-centred environment and facilitate timely feedback, ultimately supporting the development of trainees into stronger family physicians, hospital clinicians, and specialists.

Third, uphold your professionalism and integrity. The practice of medicine is not solely about acquiring knowledge and skills. It also carries a profound responsibility of ethical and responsible practice.

The trust that you build with your patients enables you to partner with them to improve their health and well-being. Never take this trust for granted. Strive towards excellence, serve your patients with care, and uphold high standards of professional practice and conduct. The SMC Ethical Code and Guidelines are and will continue to be your guide.

We will continue to support doctors in the meting out your duties with integrity. For instance, for the issue of informed consent, we convened a Workgroup to discuss the issue, and implemented its recommendations. One such recommendation was the establishment of clear legal standard on the duty to counsel, one which is both patient-centric and informed by the opinion of a responsible body of doctors. Allowing for shared decision making while maintaining trust between patients and physicians.



To better support doctors, SMC will be introducing a mandatory CME course in medical ethics from January 2024. Through the introduction of this course, we hope to support every doctor in handling ethical issues and dilemmas you may face in the course of your work, with confidence and assurance.

### **The Pledge as Your Compass**

Come what may in your journey ahead, the fundamental values hold true – dedication, integrity, and respect – values that are found in the Physician's Pledge. Your commitment to uphold these values will impact you and your practice, and the well-being and lives of your patients.

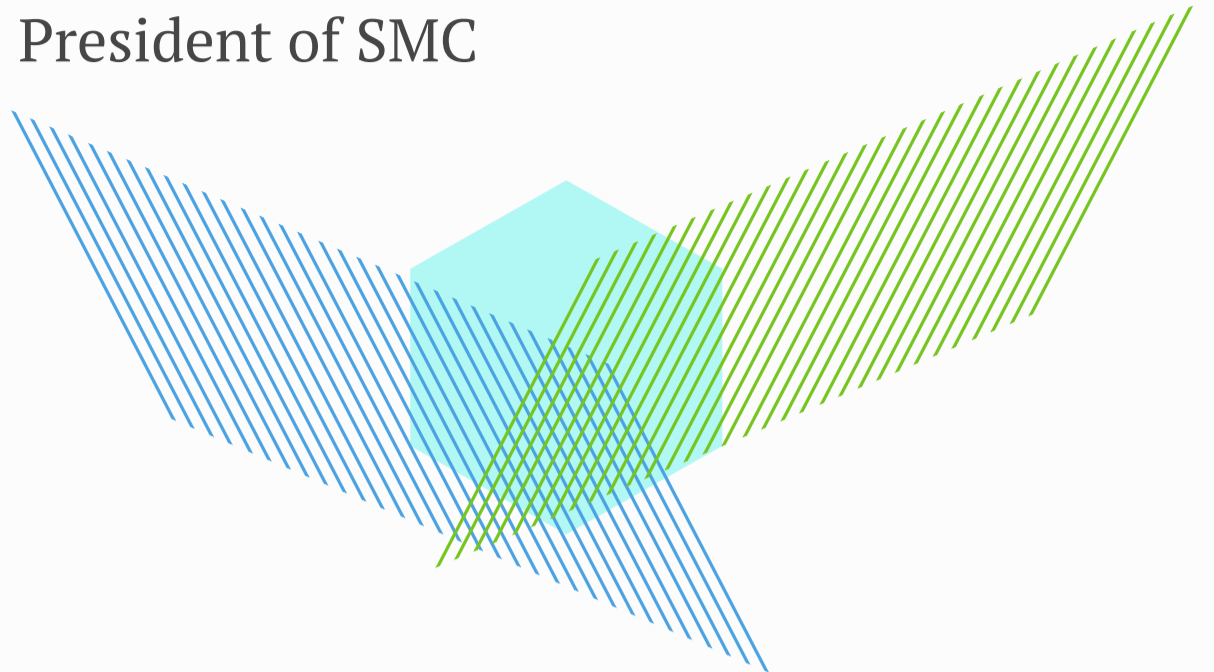
May the solemn promises you make today be a steady compass guiding you in your career. I wish you the very best in your journey ahead.

Thank you.



## Speech by Professor Chee Yam Cheng

President of SMC



On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I warmly welcome and thank Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Second Minister for Health and all our guests for joining the Council this afternoon to witness our younger colleagues take the Physician's Pledge.

We have more than 500 doctors today who are taking the Pledge.

The Pledge is not just a mere formal recitation, it is a solemn promise or undertaking by every doctor before he can be fully registered to practise independently. This is required by the Medical Registration Act.

The Pledge encapsulates the ethical values doctors are expected to hold professionally at all times. Since 1995, every doctor has taken the Pledge before he or she can be admitted as a fully registered practitioner.

### The Physician's Pledge

The Physician's Pledge is based on the Declaration of Geneva and reflects the ethical values in the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines (or ECEG for short).

In the first sentence, you solemnly pledge to dedicate your life to the service of humanity. This is your mission, the reason why you spent many years to study and learn medicine.

All the parts of the Pledge are linked to the mission: to dedicate your life to the service of humanity.

You have studied and worked hard since your primary and secondary school days, college and university to arrive at this day.

But all your good work can be diminished or even destroyed by indiscretion, unethical professional behaviour, dishonesty and lack of integrity.



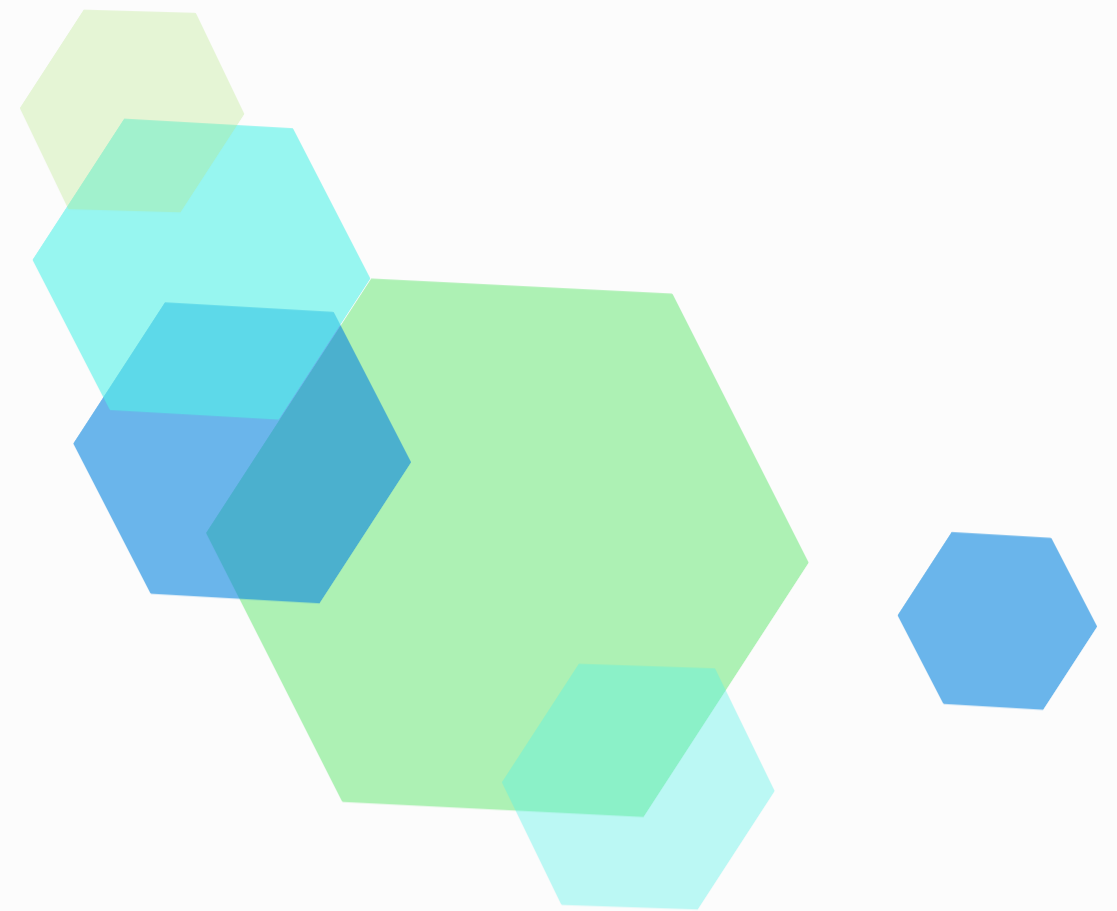
We remind ourselves that it is not only for our patients, it is for ourselves that we constantly take heed to the SMC's ECEG.

Even as you progress in your career or continue to study as postgraduate doctors, training to be family physicians and specialists, all the more you must remember the responsibilities that were vested on you as a professional.

There are no clearer examples than the medically related disciplinary cases. Your patients depend and rely on you.

Many examples of disciplinary cases involving doctors continue to be published in SMC's Annual Reports and the media.

The medical education you received has therefore rightly put clear emphasis on ethics and professionalism. The SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines, as well as the SMC Handbook on Medical Ethics are freely available for our reference and guidance.



### **Compulsory CME on Medical Ethics for doctors**

To ensure that doctors are familiar with and up-to-date on ethical issues and best practices, Continuing Medical Education (CME) on Medical Ethics will be made mandatory for doctors as recommended by the MOH Workgroup which reviewed the taking of Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process sometime ago.

*All the parts of the Pledge are linked to the mission: to dedicate your life to the service of humanity.*

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 baseline level of knowledge on the applicable legal standards in practice that will allow them to practice effectively."

The Mandatory Medical Ethics component in the SMC CME requirements will start from the Practising Certificate (or PC) qualifying period from 2024 (next year).

From then on, all registered doctors must obtain the minimum Medical Ethics CME core points before they can renew their PCs from the year 2026.

The Council is grateful to have the partnership of the three medical professional bodies, namely, the Academy of Medicine Singapore, College of Family Physicians Singapore and Singapore Medical Association which have developed the Medical Ethics curriculum.

The curriculum will be progressively rolled out and will cover four fundamental core topics:

- i. Professionalism;
- ii. Ethics;
- iii. Informed Consent and Medical Decision Making; and
- iv. Medical Records, Privacy and Confidentiality.

The details of the requirements have been circulated to all doctors via an SMC Circular on 11 May this year, and published in the SMC newsletters in November 2022 and July 2023. If this is new to you, I urge you to find the Circular and read the SMC newsletters on the SMC website.

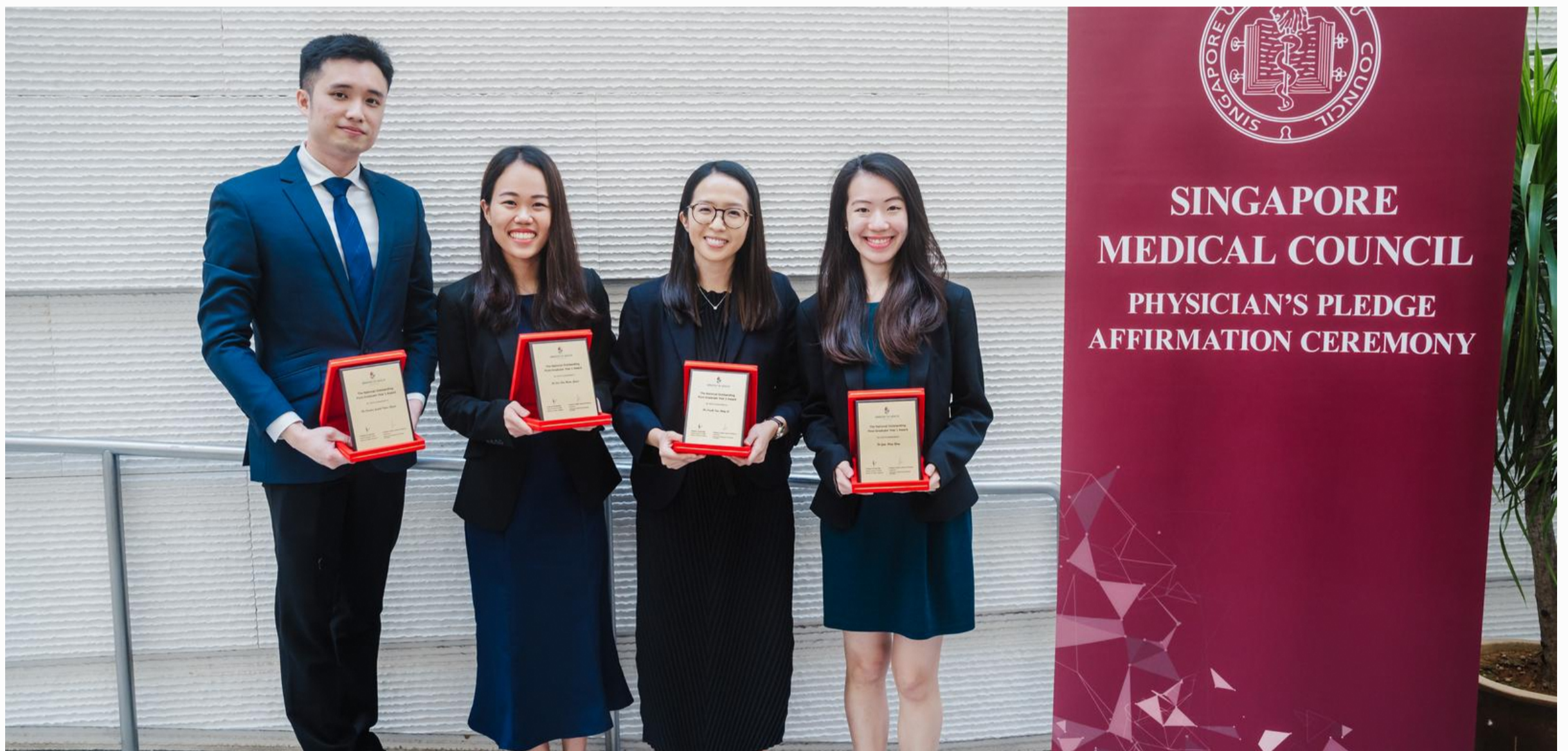


## National Outstanding Postgraduate Year 1 Award

Many of you here are currently in your Postgraduate Year 1 or PGY1 and would agree that this is a demanding period of training.

I am pleased to inform you that MOH is resuming the presentation of the National Outstanding PGY1 Award in the SMC Pledge Ceremony in September.

This annual award by the Ministry of Health began in 2017 to recognise the PGY1 medical graduates who had consistently demonstrated excellence in the PGY1 training programme. Today, MOH will be presenting the awards to 10 such doctors from the 2022 cohort who have demonstrated exemplary performance, exceptional leadership, interpersonal and clinical skills in the various postings throughout their 12-month training.



## Conclusion

In closing, I congratulate you on your achievements as you start your medical career. If you face difficult situations and ethical dilemmas, let the Physician's Pledge serve as your compass. Practise within the guidelines stated in the ECEG, and uphold the trust and confidence placed upon you by your patients, profession, and society. On behalf of the Council, I wish you all a fruitful and fulfilling medical career ahead.

Thank you.

## SMC's Response to the Straits Times Commentary

*70 Percent of Complaints Lodged in 2022 Were Concluded with a Year*

We refer to the commentary "Complaints against docs still take years to address, despite moves to speed things up" (Oct 3).

The Singapore Medical Council (SMC) complaints process comprises two stages.

First, inquiry committees (IC) and complaints committees (CC) investigate complaints to determine whether a referral to a Disciplinary Tribunal (DT) is warranted.

Second, for cases that are referred to a DT, hearings are conducted where the doctor and SMC are represented by lawyers.

For cases that do not merit a DT hearing, measures that a CC may take include issuing warnings to doctors, directing mediation or dismissing the complaint.

Since 2019, the SMC has implemented initiatives to facilitate the prompt conclusion of disciplinary proceedings.

These include improving internal processes, enhancing training for CC and DT members, and working closely with the Academy of Medicine Singapore and College of Family Physicians Singapore to obtain expert reports expeditiously.

In July 2022, ICs were introduced as part of the amended Medical Registration Act (MRA) to filter out unmeritorious complaints and ensure that only complaints that require investigation are referred to CCs.

Complaints filed after July 1, 2022 are subject to the new processes under the amended MRA, while other ongoing disciplinary inquiries are subject to the MRA in force at the time when the complaints were submitted.

Following all these measures, 70 per cent of complaints lodged in 2022 were concluded within a year versus 23 per cent in 2018.

Of these, more than one-third of the 53 complaints received last year were concluded by the ICs within two months.

Some disciplinary inquiries take longer to conclude as the cases are more complex and may require input from expert witnesses.



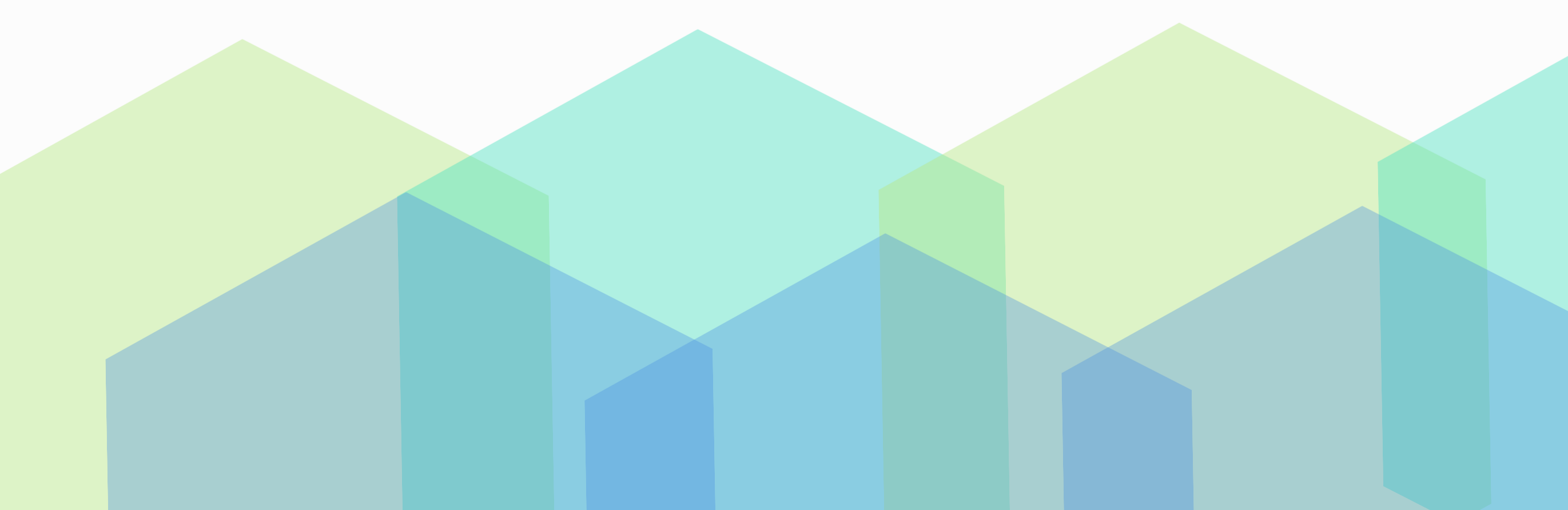
Other cases are subject to the completion of ongoing court proceedings, coroner's inquiries or police investigations before the disciplinary inquiries can continue. Procedural challenges and applications by respondent doctors to extend the time allocated to submit their defence further introduce delays to disciplinary proceedings.



If evidence emerges following investigations at the CC/DT stages that public safety is a concern, interim orders are issued expeditiously to safeguard the patients.

SMC endeavours to bring all disciplinary inquiries to a timely conclusion, balancing between expediting the completion of the inquiries and ensuring that the inquiries are conducted thoroughly, so as to ensure fair and just outcomes for all parties.

**Professor Chee Yam Cheng**  
**President**



## Series in Professional Ethics

# Overview of Interim Orders Committee (IOC) and Interim Orders

### Q1. Which types of interim orders can the IOC make?

The IOC may make either an interim *suspension* order or an interim *restriction* order. An interim *suspension* order suspends the registration of the medical practitioner for up to 18 months whereas an interim *restriction* order subjects the registration of the medical practitioner be conditional on his or her compliance with conditions or restrictions specified by the IOC also for a period not exceeding 18 months. If required, the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) may apply to the High Court for further extensions of the interim orders of up to 12 months at each time.

### Q2. How long does it take for the IOC to make an interim order?

When there is sufficient evidence before the IOC that it is necessary for the protection of the members of the public or in the public interest or in the interests of the registered medical practitioner for an interim order to be issued, the IOC will issue the order without undue delay. Sometimes, this may not be apparent at the outset of a disciplinary case as evidence may only emerge following investigations at the Complaints Committee (“CC”) or Disciplinary Tribunal (“DT”) stages.

An *immediate* interim order may also be issued without first giving the medical practitioner an opportunity to be heard. This can happen if the IOC is satisfied that a court of law in Singapore has found that the medical practitioner has engaged in any conduct alleged in the complaint or information, and that the conduct poses an imminent danger to the health or safety of any patient of the medical practitioner.

Alternatively, the SMC can certify that it is of the opinion that any conduct alleged in the complaint or information poses an imminent danger to the health or safety of any patient of the medical practitioner such that an *immediate* interim order must be made against the said medical practitioner.



### Q3. How often does the IOC review an interim order?

- ▶ The IOC is required by law to review an interim order within six months of the date on which the order was made and, subsequently, to review the order at three-month intervals for as long as the order continues to be in force.
- ▶ The IOC may also review the interim order when there is new evidence relevant to the order has become available after the making of the said order.

### Q4. Can a medical practitioner request to revoke or vary an interim order?

- ▶ Yes, a medical practitioner can apply to the High Court to:
  - revoke the interim suspension order, or
  - revoke or vary any condition or restriction imposed by an interim restriction order.

The application must be made within 14 days after being notified of the interim order.

### Q5. Do medical practitioners face double punishment from both the IOC and the DT?

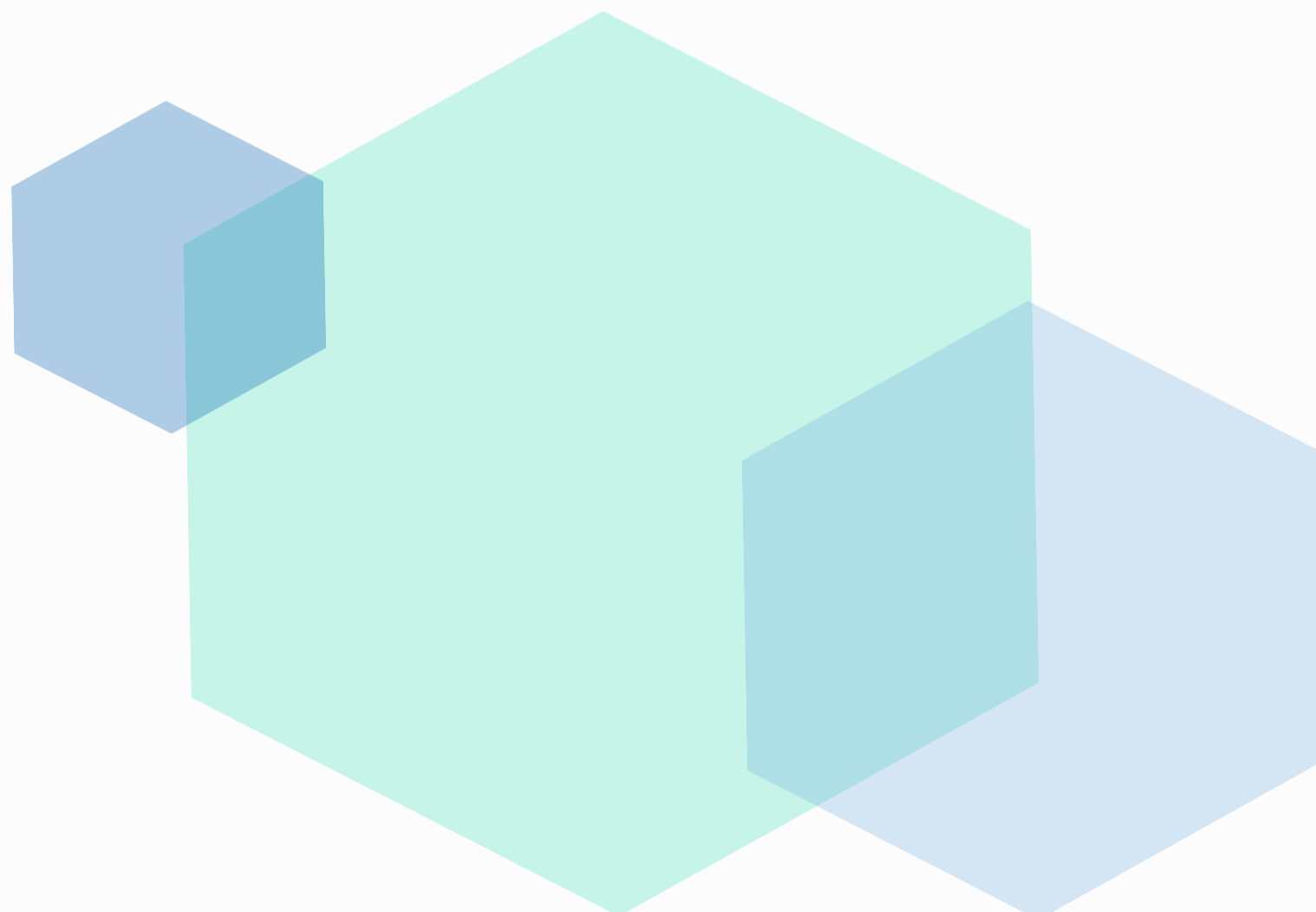
- ▶ No, this is not double punishment. The interim order by the IOC and the order made by the DT are separate and distinct measures that serve different purposes. The interim order is a temporary measure that is intended to protect public interest while the investigation or disciplinary proceedings are ongoing. When the medical practitioner is found guilty of professional misconduct by the DT, the orders issued by the DT set out the sanctions that the medical practitioner will face as a result of the offences.

Q6. Would it be unfair to the medical practitioner if he/she was suspended for a prolonged duration under the interim order while disciplinary proceedings were held in abeyance, or pending investigations by enforcement agencies such as the Singapore Police Force or ongoing Court proceedings?

Where the relevant CC or DT has held its proceedings in abeyance for such reasons, resulting in inordinate delay, the DT hearing the case may consider this as a mitigating factor in sentencing, provided the medical practitioner has suffered prejudice because of the delay and was not the cause of the delay, and there are no countervailing public interest considerations. Generally, this is also an accepted practice in the criminal courts and the courts would apply similar considerations if there was inordinate delay in prosecuting the offender.

Q7. Is the medical practitioner under an interim suspension order regarded as registered with SMC?

- ▶ No, even though the medical practitioner's name still remains on the Register while he/she is suspended by virtue of an interim suspension order, the medical practitioner is not regarded as being registered with SMC.
- ▶ Only upon the expiration or revocation of an interim suspension order, the medical practitioner's rights and privileges as a registered medical practitioner are revived immediately after the date of the expiration or revocation, but only if he or she has complied with all the terms of the order.



# Reminder Practising Certificate (PC) Renewal

## 1.

### *For Who?*

Fully and conditionally registered doctors whose **Practising Certificates (PCs)** are **expiring on 31 December 2023**, can submit their application from 2 September 2023.

## 2.

### *PC Renewal Criteria*

- Obtained **sufficient Continuing Medical Education (CME) points** within the qualifying period
- **Must not have any outstanding fine** for not voting in previous SMC's Elections (applies to doctors on full registration only)

## 3.

### *How to Renew?*

- Doctors need to **log into the Professional Registration Systems (PRS)** on the SMC website with their Singpass before their PC expires to apply for a renewal.
- Applications submitted on and after **2 December 2023** will be considered as late applications. A late application fee of \$80 will apply.

## 4.

### *Reminder*

Doctors are reminded to log into the PRS to **update their contact details** such as **email addresses, handphone numbers and employment information** so as not to miss any important notifications from SMC.



## SMC Newsletter Editorial Committee

A/Prof Tan Beng Hoi Agnes -  
Chairman

A/Prof Chen Fun Gee

Dr Ho Kok Sun

Dr Lau Hong Choon

Dr S. Suraj Kumar

### Disclaimer

Comments and opinions made by individuals and parties who have contributed to or interviewed by the SMC Newsletter are solely those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the SMC. While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the SMC bears no responsibility or liability in any way for the content, information, photographs, illustrations and other material in this publication. No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior written permission of the SMC. All facts are correct at the time of publication.

For any enquiries, you may contact the SMC at [smc@spb.gov.sg](mailto:smc@spb.gov.sg).