



SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

16 College Road, #01-01 College of Medicine Building, Singapore 169854

E-mail Address: enquiries@smc.gov.sg

Website: <http://www.smc.gov.sg>

Fax Number: (65) 6258-2134

09 March 2012

PRESS RELEASE

DISCIPLINARY INQUIRY FOR DR SAIFUDDIN BIN SIDEK

1. The Disciplinary Committee (“**DC**”) of the Singapore Medical Council (“**SMC**”) held a disciplinary inquiry for Dr Saifuddin bin Sidek (“**Dr Saifuddin**”), age 52, a registered medical practitioner and an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist practising at Sidek Clinic for Women, located at 3 Simei Street 6 #04-26 Eastpoint Singapore 528833. The inquiry was held on 1 and 2 February 2012. The proceedings arose out a complaint to the SMC dated 20 May 2010.
2. Dr Saifuddin faced two charges of professional misconduct under section 45(1)(d) of the Medical Registration Act (“**MRA**”) in relation to the management of one of his patients (“**the Patient**”) for:-
 - a. Errantly prescribing benzodiazepines to the Patient; and
 - b. Conducting himself inappropriately with the Patient.
3. Dr Saifuddin pleaded guilty to both charges at the inquiry and, accordingly, the DC convicted him of both charges.
4. In relation to the first charge, the DC noted that benzodiazepines are prescribed as hypnotic medication for patients who have insomnia or as anxiolytics for the short-term relief of anxiety. However, the long-term consumption of benzodiazepines may lead to drug dependence and tolerance. It is therefore incumbent on all medical practitioners to be appraised of the current medical standards and prescribing practice, in the interests of their practice and patients.
5. The DC found that Dr Saifuddin had acted in disregard of his professional duties as the prolonged prescription of benzodiazepines without specialist referral or *any* medical records is inappropriate and unprofessional.

6. The DC was of the view that the misconduct of improper prescription of benzodiazepines attracts substantial punishment, which usually involves a period of suspension for the medical practitioner concerned. The DC noted that in the present case, Dr Saifuddin had been very lax in his prescription of benzodiazepines to the Patient. The DC also noted with grave concern that Dr Saifuddin had prescribed benzodiazepines to the Patient on at least 14 occasions from August 2007 to April 2010, without maintaining “any” medical records in respect of the prescription of benzodiazepines to the Patient. Such failure invariably meant that Dr Saifuddin was not in any position to conduct any clinical review of the Patient which is a crucial aspect of treatment involving benzodiazepines.
7. The DC noted that Dr Saifuddin did not adequately supervise the usage of the high dosage prescriptions, which were left to the Patient to consume on her own. Further, not only was there no evidence that Dr Saifuddin had tried to taper down the dosages of the Patient’s consumption of benzodiazepines, Dr Saifuddin had also facilitated the Patient’s addiction to benzodiazepines by delivering benzodiazepines to her personally and by providing her with post-dated prescriptions of benzodiazepines through the post.
8. The DC found Dr Saifuddin’s repeated prescriptions of benzodiazepines to the Patient to be cavalier and irresponsible when he was aware that the Patient’s parents were seeking to regulate her reliance on benzodiazepines. Instead of working with the Patient’s parents, Dr Saifuddin effectively undermined such efforts by his prescriptions of benzodiazepines to the Patient. The dosages and quantities of benzodiazepines prescribed to the patient by Dr Saifuddin were exceedingly high and were completely unjustifiable by any clinical indication.
9. The DC emphasised that it is a basic tenet of the ethical code that a physician is expected to be an advocate for patients’ care and wellbeing and endeavour to ensure that patients suffer no harm. The DC was of the view that this duty had been breached by Dr Saifuddin through his actions.
10. Taking the above circumstances into consideration, the DC was of the view that the appropriate sentence in respect of the first charge is a period of suspension of 3 months.
11. In relation to the second charge, the DC emphasised that while there is nothing wrong in offering assistance to a Patient, a physician must at all times observe the boundaries of a doctor-patient relationship.

12. When Dr Saifuddin started prescribing Benzodiazepines to the Patient after treating her as her gynaecologist, he continued a doctor-patient relationship with her. Dr Saifuddin's claim that he had developed an "*avuncular social relationship*" with the Patient was rejected by the DC who noted that a physician must maintain a professional relationship with his Patient. Dr Saifuddin had in fact pleaded guilty to the charge which states that the Patient was under his care as a doctor at the material time.
13. The DC found that Dr Saifuddin had allowed his relationship to cloud his judgment which resulted in his errant prescription and in him checking the Patient into various hotels.
14. However, the DC was of the view that at all times, Dr Saifuddin genuinely wanted to help the Patient, and there was no evidence of any intention by Dr Saifuddin to derive any benefit from his actions. The DC also took into account the long good standing of Dr Saifuddin, financial hardship of his family and the testimonials tendered on his behalf.
15. Taking the above circumstances into account, the DC was of the view that the appropriate punishment in respect of the second charge is the imposition of a censure. The DC highlighted that while such a punishment may on its face appear to be lenient, it is appropriate given the punishment of suspension in the first charge. The DC noted that unlike the facts and circumstances underlining the sentencing precedents, there was no evidence of any sexual relationship between Dr Saifuddin and the Patient in the present case, nor was there any evidence that Dr Saifuddin had attempted to take advantage of the Patient at all material times. The DC added that if there was any sexual relationship or attempt to take advantage of the Patient, the DC would have no hesitation to remove Dr Saifuddin from the Register of Medical Practitioners or to impose a long period of suspension.
16. At the conclusion of the inquiry, the DC ordered that Dr Saifuddin:
 - a. be suspended from practice for **3 months**;
 - b. be censured;
 - c. gives a written undertaking to the SMC that he will not engage in the conduct complained of, or any similar conduct;
 - d. bears the costs and expenses of and incidental to these proceedings, including the costs of the counsel to the SMC and the Legal Assessor.

The DC also ordered that the Grounds of Decision of this inquiry be published.

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