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PRESS RELEASE

DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL INQUIRY FOR DR NG TECK KENG

1. The Disciplinary Tribunal (“DT”) of the Singapore Medical Council (“SMC”) held a disciplinary inquiry hearing on 31 October 2014 for Dr Ng Teck Keng (“Dr Ng”), age 50 years, of Sunshine Clinic Family Practice and Surgery located at Block 445 Tampines Street 42, #01-02, Singapore 520445 (“the Clinic”).
2. Dr Ng faced one charge of professional misconduct for failing to exercise due care in the management of one of his patients.
3. The substance of the charge against Dr Ng was that he had inappropriately prescribed Dormicum, a highly dependence-forming hypnotic drug (benzodiazepine) to the patient for a period of 7 years from 23 March 2005 to 31 July 2012.
4. The Prosecution’s case was that:
 - (a) Dr Ng was aware that the patient may have obtained Dormicum from other medical practitioners concurrently but he continued to prescribe Dormicum to the patient.
 - (b) Dr Ng’s case notes lacked sufficient details of his diagnosis for the patient, advice given and/or management plan for the patient.
 - (c) Dr Ng’s prescribing practice was at the material time in contravention of the Administrative Guidelines on the Prescribing

of Benzodiazepines and Other Hypnotics issued by the Ministry of Health (“MOH”) on 14 October 2008.

- (d) Dr Ng did not refer the patient to a psychiatrist or other appropriate specialist for management of the patient’s sleep-related issues in a timely manner. The patient was only referred to a psychiatrist at a local hospital following his admission in July 2007. Furthermore, Dr Ng did not subsequently communicate with or facilitate a joint management of the patient with the psychiatrist at the local hospital.
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- 5. Dr Ng pleaded guilty to the charge and the DT accordingly found him guilty of professional misconduct under Section 53(1)(d) of the Medical Registration Act.
 - 6. The DT noted that there were several aggravating factors in Dr Ng’s case. First, Dr Ng had inappropriately prescribed Dormicum to the patient for a very long period of time exceeding 7 years to feed the patient’s addiction. Second, Dr Ng had prescribed a huge quantum of Dormicum to the patient, namely, a total of 80 tablets of Dormicum 15 mg on 8 occasions within a 5-month period between 5 March 2012 and 31 July 2012.
 - 7. The DT was of the view that as physicians are empowered to decide the dispensation of such drugs, their authority must be exercised with extreme prudence and caution. If misapplied, the consequences may be dire as is the case here with the patient being warded in the Intensive Care Unit at a local hospital for overdose.
 - 8. The DT also noted that although Dr Ng had received a letter from the complainant (the patient’s father) dated 11 March 2011 requesting that Dr Ng refrain from treating the patient with the prescription of medication that would support his addiction, Dr Ng continued with the inappropriate prescription till 31 July 2012.

9. Bearing in mind the strong aggravating factors, the DT was of the view that the minimum suspension period of 3 months would not adequately address the seriousness of Dr Ng's case.
10. In making its decision, the DT also considered several mitigating factors, including Dr Ng's personal mitigating factors. The DT also noted that Dr Ng had elected to plead guilty to the charge at an early stage of the proceedings and thus gave him the full credit for his remorse. From the evidence adduced, the DT was also satisfied that Dr Ng was not motivated by financial gain in prescribing the hypnotic drug to the patient. For these reasons, the DT exercised its discretion not to impose a monetary penalty.
11. In the circumstances, upon taking the evidence and mitigating factors into consideration, the DT ordered that Dr Ng:
 - (a) be suspended for a period of **4 months**;
 - (b) be censured;
 - (c) provide a written undertaking to the SMC that he will not engage in the conduct complained of, or of any similar conduct; and
 - (d) pay the costs and expenses of and incidental to the proceedings, including the costs of the solicitors to the SMC.
12. The DT also ordered that the Grounds of Decision be published.
13. Dr Ng's 4-month suspension took effect on **1 December 2014 and will run to 31 March 2015 (both dates inclusive)**.

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