

## Compulsory CME on Medical Ethics for All Doctors

In November 2019, the Report on Recommendations by the Workgroup to review the taking of Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process (see MOH website [here](#)) was published. Amongst the various recommendations the Workgroup made was one for the establishment of compulsory continuing medical education (CME) on Medical Ethics for all doctors. The Workgroup had identified that there was a need to increase doctors' awareness of ethical issues and developments, such as informed consent, as these developments could have a significant impact on the practice of medicine. Doctors would need to be updated on ethical issues to ensure that they have the knowledge that would enable them to practise ethically, effectively and safely.

Recommendation 10 of the Report is reproduced here.

### Recommendation 10

***Introduce compulsory Continuing Medical Education (CME) on medical ethics for all doctors, in particular informed consent and the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines, SMC disciplinary processes and pertinent medico-legal cases.***

Currently, all doctors have to receive compulsory CME as a requirement for the renewal of their practice licenses. This is because the body of medical knowledge and evidence as well as the practice of medicine is ever-evolving and there is a need to ensure that doctors remain up to date with the major scientific developments in medicine. There is, however, no requirement for this CME to have a compulsory ethics component even though the ethical environment of medical practice is likewise evolving.

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.

We recommend incentivising and tracking the completion of such courses by making such modules compulsory, and awarding core CME points upon their completion. A core medico-legal curriculum should also be developed to complement and support this proposal.

To ensure that doctors are familiar with the ethical obligations and kept abreast of latest applicable standards of ethical practice, we recommend that ethics education and/or training be made a compulsory part of doctors' CME, i.e. "core points". Currently, doctors are required to attain 50 CME points in a two-year period for license renewal. A significant portion (say 5 points) of these 50 points should and must come from CME education and training.

### **Sub-Committee in SMC's Continuing Medical Education Co-ordinating Committee (CMECC) Formed to Establish Basic Curriculum and Standards**

Guided by this recommendation, the SMC worked with the three medical Professional Bodies, the Academy of Medicine Singapore (AMS), College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS) and Singapore Medical Association (SMA) to enable this.

A sub-committee in SMC's CMECC was formed with representatives from AMS, CFPS and SMA to establish the basic curriculum and standards for mandatory Medical Ethics CME activities, formulate a framework and guidelines for the review of CME providers which apply to be Medical Ethics CME providers and make recommendations to the SMC (through the CMECC) for the accreditation of Medical Ethics CME providers and Ethics CME activities.

## Curriculum for Medical Ethics Programme/Activities

The three Professional Bodies jointly established the Medical Ethics curriculum, which includes four basic core topics encompassing the following:

- Professionalism / Medical Professionalism
- Ethics (e.g. Four boxes approach, Ethical analysis in medicine, Public Health Ethics, Research Ethics)
- Informed Consent and Medical Decision Making
- Medical Records, Privacy and Confidentiality

Doctors will be expected to achieve CME points in these four core topics when compulsory CME for Medical Ethics is implemented. Besides the above four topics, the following areas will also be included for CME activities in medical ethics:

- Notification, Certification & Dispensing
- Medicine and the Law
- Important Issues in Clinical Ethics e.g. End of Life Issues, Transplant Ethics, Assisted Reproduction, Big Data
- Professional Accountability, Medical Negligence and Risk Management

- Communication Skills, Medical Report Writing and Personal Development
- Practice Issues
- Setting up Practice
- Conflicts of Interests
- Collegiality and working in teams
- Telemedicine
- Novel therapy and Experimental treatment

## Information on Medical Ethics Programmes/Activities

It was emphasised that the Medical Ethics programmes and activities conducted by the Professional Bodies are not restricted to their members only. Doctors who are not members of the Professional Bodies can sign up and participate in the Medical Ethics programmes and activities of their interest.

Doctors may explore and access information on Medical Ethics programmes and activities organised by the three Professional Bodies in their respective websites when their programmes get underway.

## Doctors' Participation Encouraged

In anticipation of the roll-out for this compulsory CME requirements on Medical Ethics in 2026<sup>1</sup>, SMC would like to encourage all doctors to look out for our circulars and announcements when the Medical Ethics programmes are ready. SMC would like to encourage doctors to start participating in CME programmes on Medical Ethics and not wait till January 2024 to start accumulating Medical Ethics Core points when CME for Medical Ethics becomes mandatory.

The Professional Bodies' Medical Ethics programmes and CME activities will enable doctors to gain the requisite knowledge of medical ethics and keep abreast of the latest applicable standards of ethical practice. Accessing and participating in the AMS, CFPS and SMA's programmes on Medical Ethics programmes and activities will also enable doctors to fulfil the compulsory CME requirements on Medical Ethics once this is in place.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctors with CME Qualifying Period (QP) from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025 (2-year PC) may begin accumulating Medical Ethics Core points from 1 January 2024, while doctors with CME QP from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 (1-year PC) may do so from 1 January 2025.