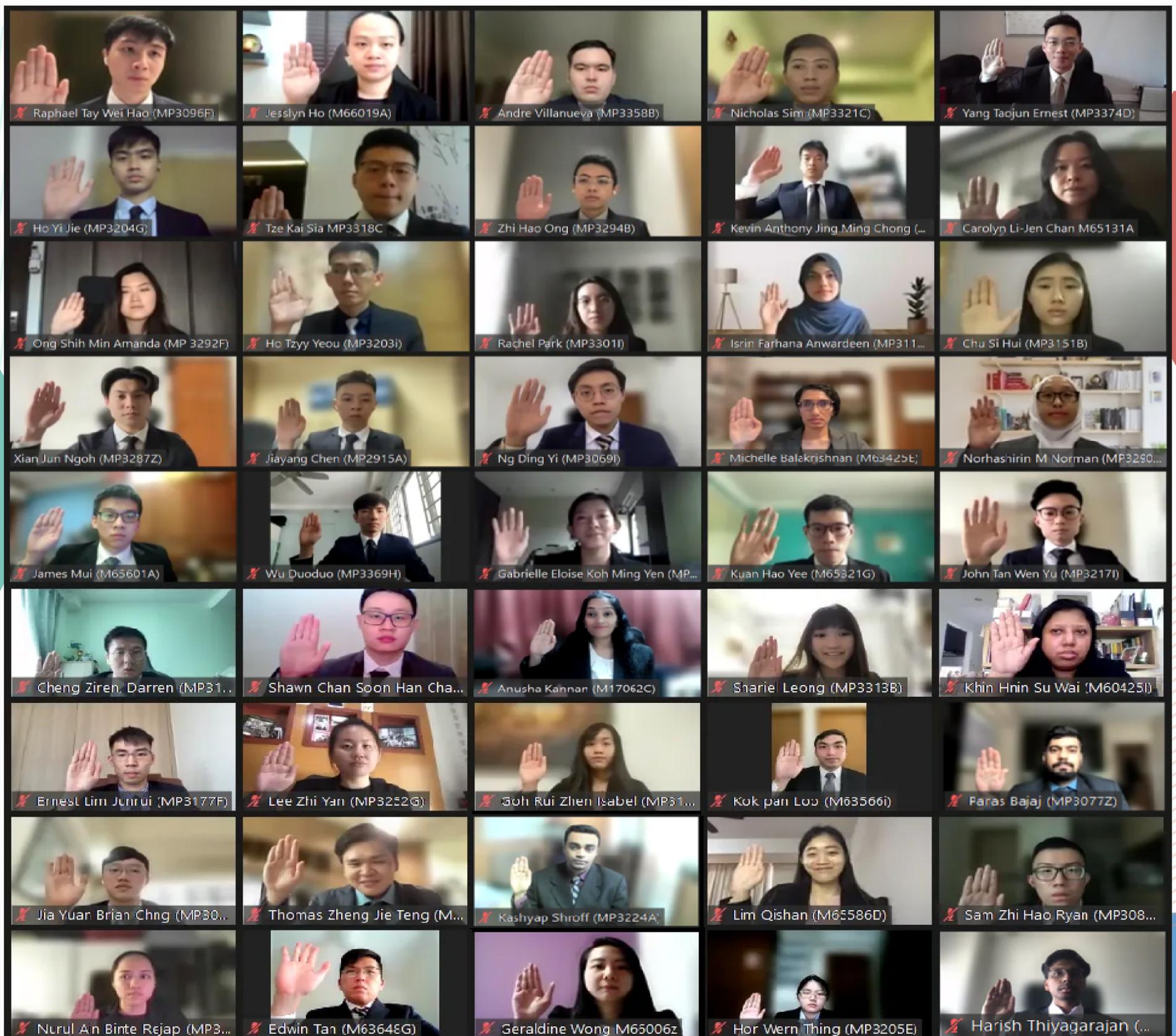


SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

24 September 2022

The recent SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony was held virtually on 24 September 2022. The event saw 483 provisionally and conditionally-registered doctors taking the Pledge as a key milestone in their medical career. The oath-taking is a significant and momentous affair, where doctors are reminded of the importance of their role in society, and their responsibilities to their patients.

The SMC was honoured to have Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State 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, medical schools, and Chairmen of Medical Boards of hospitals.





Speech by Guest of Honour Dr Janil Puthucheary Senior Minister of State for Health

It is my privilege to join you today for the Physician's Pledge Ceremony. The Pledge is a significant milestone for doctors.

The solemn oath you are about to undertake, affirms the duties and responsibilities towards your patients, colleagues and all those who have put their trust in you. Today, you “dedicate your life to the service of humanity” and commit to uphold the high professional and ethical standards of the medical profession.

To all members of the profession, thank you for your service especially over the last two and a half years. It has not been easy, but you have shown tenacity and grit. Our public has unwavering confidence in the quality and integrity of our doctors. This is a testament of your professionalism and dedication. Thank you for keeping Singapore safe.

The strains of the pandemic have also highlighted the challenges faced by junior doctors. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is actively studying these issues and is currently engaging with doctors across all ranks. This includes, but is not limited to, key areas such as duty hours, career options, and work processes. We are also working with educators and regulators like the Singapore Medical Council (SMC), the Specialists Accreditation Board and the Family Physicians Accreditation Board to ensure that any changes do not compromise training outcomes.

As physicians, regardless of whether you are based in the community or in the hospital, you will be required to ensure the holistic well-being of each patient, by facilitating thorough continuity of care with colleagues.

We will always have to work at enhancing our healthcare system. In doing so we hold fast to the fundamental tenets in our practice to protect the health and safety of our patients. You will all be familiar with “*Primum non nocere*”, which is “first do no harm”. In the Pledge we state, “to practise my profession with conscience and dignity; make the health of my patient my first consideration”. Self-regulation is an important part of ensuring we adhere to the high standards that our patients expect and deserve.

Commencement of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020

The Medical Registration (Amendment) Act came into force on 1 July 2022. Over the last few years, the Singapore Medical Council and MOH have been working to prepare the implementation of the recommendations that were made by the Workgroup, to review the Taking of Informed Consent and the SMC's Disciplinary Process.

Under the amended Act, we hope to bring about greater transparency in the disciplinary process, quicker resolution of complaints as well as consistent and fair enforcement of standards. One of the key changes is the establishment of a Disciplinary Commission (DC) which is separate and independent of the SMC. The formation of the DC under MOH addresses concerns about the perceived lack of independence of the Disciplinary Tribunals (DT) that were previously appointed by the SMC. This ensures a clear separation of the governance for investigation and prosecution by the SMC, and adjudication functions by the DT, which will now be appointed by the DC. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the doctors, legal professionals and laypersons whom, together numbered more than 400, have been appointed to the SMC Complaints Panel to assist the medical profession in its self-regulation, which at its core, functions to protect patients' best interests.

The workgroup had also recommended that the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines (ECEG) be revised. The SMC is currently working on the revision of the ECEG and the Handbook on Medical Ethics. Upon completion, the revisions will be circulated and made available on the SMC's website. I urge all doctors to read this important document, which will guide you throughout your professional careers.

Healthier SG

Just as we are updating and evolving the governance of our healthcare system, we are moving forward to tackle other pertinent health issues within our community. The Healthier SG campaign is a major reform of our healthcare system. This strategy looks at Population Health, and includes issues that come with an ageing population, increasing chronic disease burden and rising healthcare costs. We want to shift the emphasis further to a focus on preventive health and healthcare.

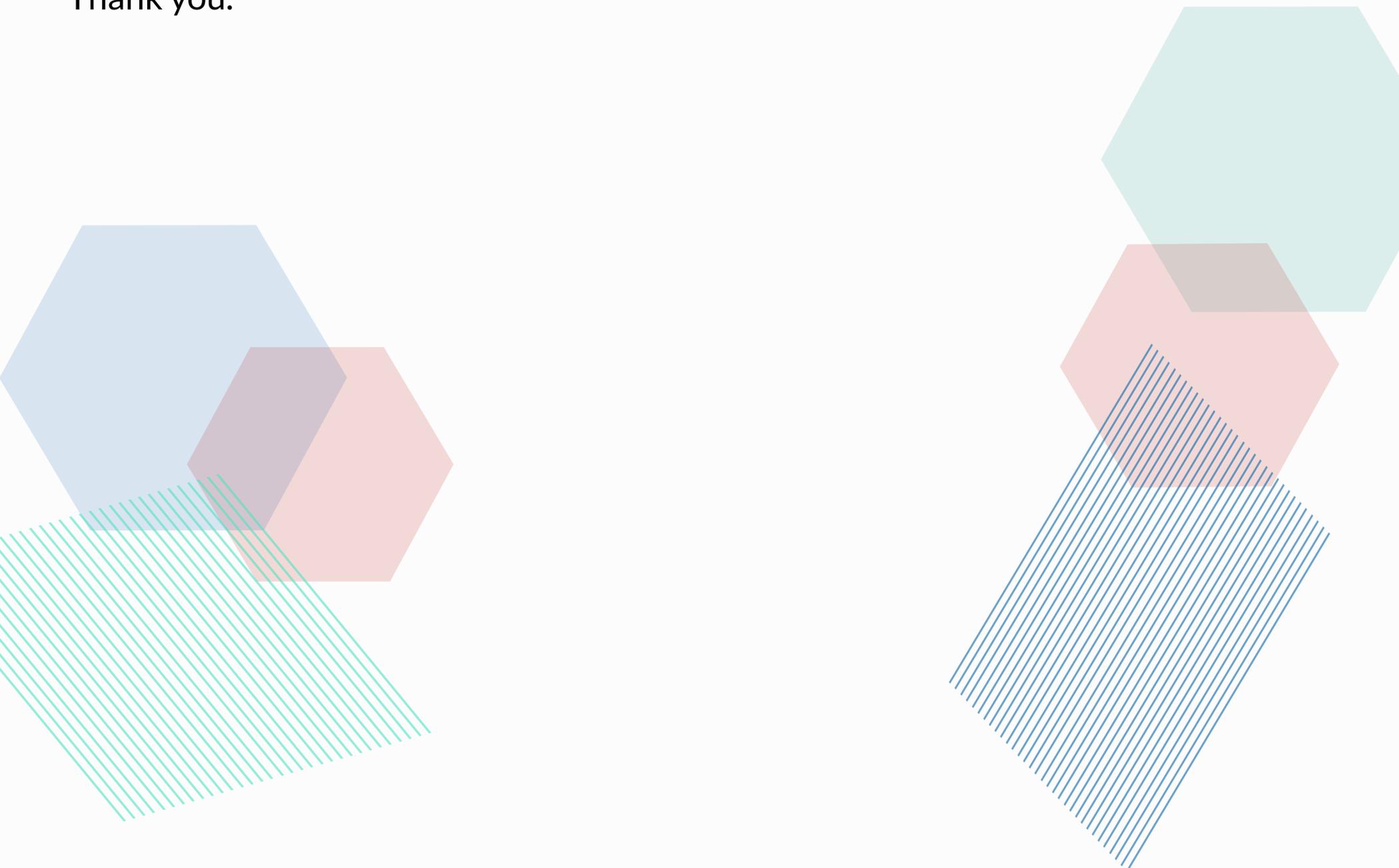
You will find that the structure of our healthcare system will be in a state of transformation, with the mobilisation of family doctors to engage more directly with the population. Hospital-based doctors will increasingly hand over the care of the patient, after an acute inpatient admission, back to family doctors. As physicians, regardless of whether you are based in the community or in the hospital, you will be required to ensure the holistic well-being of each patient, by facilitating thorough continuity of care with colleagues.

Closing Remarks

In closing, my advice to you is to embrace a culture of lifelong personal development, upgrading your clinical knowledge, reflecting on how we can improve our practice, being more ethical and principled. My wish for you is that you remain steadfast in your dedication and commitment to upholding our highest professional and ethical standards. And my hope for you is that you will grow to be enlightened practitioners, propagating kindness and compassion to your patients and your juniors.

Congratulations once again on reaching this crucial milestone. I wish everyone the very best ahead, and a rewarding career.

Thank you.





Speech by Professor Chee Yam Cheng

President of SMC

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I warmly welcome our Guest of Honour Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State for Health and all our distinguished guests, and colleagues who are taking the Pledge today.

First let me congratulate all conditionally registered and provisionally-registered colleagues for having come to this point of taking the SMC Physician's Pledge. The Council thanks you for your hard work and endurance in difficult times. In such times, the Council had also made the regulatory processes more accessible to medical practitioners.

SMC, together with other healthcare Professional Boards collaborated with the Ministry of Health to launch the electronic Registration Certificate (or e-RC) and electronic Practising Certificate (or e-PC) in the Professional Registration System or PRS in December last year, for all registration certificates and renewal of PCs from 2022 onwards. If you apply to be fully registered after taking the Pledge, and if your application is approved, you would receive an electronic certificate stored in the PRS. You can print the certificate yourself if you wish, but the electronic copy will be permanently in the system for you to access. Your electronic documents are thus safely stored and readily accessible within our secure IT system.

Separately, the digital practising certificate or digital PC was also introduced in the Singpass phone app and you would have noticed this in your smartphones. Just like your NRIC and driving license, your practising certificate can now be viewed in your smartphones on opening of the Singpass App. The healthcare Professional Boards and Accreditation Boards were amongst the first statutory boards in Singapore to implement and launch digital certificates in the Singpass App to enable healthcare professionals to directly access their professional certificates.

Medical Registration (Amendment) Act

An important change which all of you should be aware of is the Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020 (or MRAA) which came into force on 1 July 2022. The amendments in relation to the SMC disciplinary processes allow quicker resolution of complaints by SMC and separates the disciplinary tribunal functions from the complaints function. Any complaint from 1 July 2022 referred by SMC's Complaints Committees to the Disciplinary Tribunal will now be handled by the new Disciplinary Commission under the Ministry of Health.

Along with the implementation of the MRAA, there has been a change in the Constitution of the Council in Section 4 of the Act to include members from the three professional bodies. We are pleased to welcome the Master of the Academy of Medicine Singapore and the Presidents of the College of Family Physicians Singapore and Singapore Medical Association, i.e. the AMS, CFPS and SMA who were appointed to the Council on 1 July 2022. At each Pledge ceremony, I have encouraged our colleagues to join our medical professional bodies i.e. the AMS, CFPS and SMA. The reason is not so much to benefit them but rather to benefit you. The practice of doctors is built on the foundation of medical ethics and professionalism. This is where our professional bodies excel.

The courses and webinars run by the colleges, chapters and the association are timely, relevant and useful to your practice and professionalism. Their journals have excellent reviews and their quality has been rising. Many of their activities come at no expense to you as a member but the gain you received can be immeasurable as a professional.

Emotional Support Programme

With effect from 1 June this year, the three professional bodies i.e. the AMS, CFPS and SMA have also jointly established the Emotional Support Programme for doctors who face disciplinary inquiries so that their mental and emotional well-being can be attended to when faced with the ordeal of a complaint. Doctors facing disciplinary proceedings can now approach the three Professional Bodies should they receive complaints to the SMC or face disciplinary proceedings by the Disciplinary Tribunal. The support service is independent of SMC and is administered jointly by the three bodies by volunteer doctors.

Series in Professional Ethics

This is a good time to remind us to access the SMC website and the SMC Newsletter for news and useful information. You would have received regular email notifications concerning the SMC Newsletter. The Newsletter which is published every 4 months contains useful information and short articles which updates the doctor on pertinent recent issues and news. The most recent edition of the SMC Newsletter in August had a new dedicated “Series in Professional Ethics”. The first topic in the series on “Propriety and Sexual Boundaries” highlights ethical issues and guidance on the examination of patients, an issue which has become concerning and more frequent in recent years. More topics will be shared in the series to keep doctors abreast of the common issues in complaints that the SMC receives.

The practice of doctors is built on the foundation of medical ethics and professionalism. This is where our professional bodies excel... Many of [our colleagues, chapters and association's] activities come at no expense to you as a member but the gain you received can be immeasurable as a professional.

The SMC Ethical Code

In the preamble to the SMC Ethical code, it is written that “Patients and the public must be able to trust you implicitly with their lives and well-being. To justify this trust, you have to maintain a good standard of care, conduct and behaviour. The SMC prescribes the Ethical Code which you are required to uphold. These principles are applicable to a wide variety of circumstances and situations.” The Ethical Code has three main principles described accordingly - firstly, Ensure Beneficence (doing good) and Non-maleficence (not committing harm or evil), secondly, Respect Autonomy and lastly Uphold Justice.

The Ethical Guidelines

The set of Ethical Guidelines has nine sections (A) to (I). The sections include the following: Good Clinical Care, Good Medical Practice, Relationships with Patients, Relationships with Colleagues, Maintaining health and fitness to practise, Probity, Advertising, Finances in medical practice and Doctors in business relationships.

The actual Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines or ECEG consists of 58 pages of text widely spaced for easy reading. It is not onerous to read and like all guidelines, you can choose the relevant sections when you face certain issues or if you wish to know more about certain areas in your practice. If you wish to go into details on each particular part, you can turn to the Handbook on Medical Ethics which gives a more detailed explanation on the particular code or guideline. You have read much to pass your school and university examinations. Though there is no written examination for the ECEG, you have an obligation to read the ECEG for your lifelong test – which is your personal practice as a doctor.

Conclusion

Your parents and you yourself have invested much resources and many years of your education to reach this point in your life. The Medical Registration Regulations in Section 16 requires all doctors who wish to be fully registered to take the Physician's Pledge as specified by the Medical Council. The words you are pledging today are set out in the Second Schedule of the Medical Registration Regulations. This is not a ceremonial requirement but a legislated requirement for your benefit. The Pledge is not for the enjoyment of the Council or its invited guests. Rather, it is a reminder to us that all the years of investment can be blemished, damaged or wrecked by unethical or unprofessional practice or worse, criminal acts. The ECEG is not to be disregarded, criticised nor disparaged. It is to be read, remembered, heeded and respected for one's own benefit and good.

I wish all of you happy memories of today, the day you took the Pledge to be a good doctor and to remain ethical throughout the years of your practice.

Thank you.