

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.

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President

