Welcome to this 5th edition of the SMC newsletter – SMC News.

For this edition, we profile our Council member A/Prof Chen Fun Gee, Director, Division of Graduate Medical Studies at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine to learn more about him and his thoughts on the medical profession.

SMC News will also share with you an article by Dr Leong Choon Kit, SMC Council member and Family Physician, who shares his tips for accumulating sufficient CME points so that you can renew your practising certificate without the last minute rush!

We feature the SMC Physician’s Pledge Affirmation Ceremony held in September 2015 where Minister for Health, Mr Gan Kim Yong, graced our event as our Guest of Honour.

This issue also updates on the outcome of the SMC Election 2015 and practising certificate renewal for 2016.

I hope you will enjoy reading this edition of SMC News.

Professor Tan Ser Kiat
President, Singapore Medical Council

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President’s Welcome Address at the SMC Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

Let me on behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, welcome you to this afternoon’s Pledge Ceremony.

It is an important and significant event which you should celebrate and share with your family, friends, and all those who have supported you on this long arduous journey in realising your medical career aspirations. It is a befitting start to your career for most of you here who have just graduated from medical schools as you embark to establish yourself as a doctor worthy of the profession, one which is highly respected and trusted by your patients and society. This is a trust and respect which you should never betray. To those of you who are well established practitioners and are moving towards obtaining your full registration with SMC, I bid you a very warm welcome and look forward to your continued contributions to our healthcare services.

For all of you, this is the culmination of years of studies, hard work and learning in your schools and hospitals. You have worked hard and tirelessly to look after the sick and helped make their lives better. You have dedicated yourself selflessly to your patients and their families. I am sure you would agree that the work has been more than fulfilling and has helped make a difference in your patients’ lives.

Continual Learning

As you enter this noble profession, your journey ahead is most exciting as well as challenging. You will do well to fully experience the various fields of medicine and hone your skills and clinical acumen before you decide on developing your expertise in a particular specialty.

Medicine and biomedical sciences are advancing very rapidly. Each year, close to one and a half million scientific papers are published in respected peer reviewed journals worldwide. A large number of these are medical and biomedical in nature, detailing discoveries and unravelling some of the mysteries of diseases and how the body functions. The quantum leaps made in medical science and technology has enabled major breakthroughs in treatment modalities and patient-care, making today’s medicine obsolete tomorrow. While we do not expect you to read even a tiny fraction of these publications, you must continue to learn and upgrade your skills to keep abreast of the latest discoveries and innovations relevant to your areas of practice in order to provide the best care for your patients while doing no harm.

It is for this reason that the SMC requires you to keep abreast of your knowledge to serve your patients well and safely. Fulfilling the Continuing Medical Education (CME) requirements set by SMC is mandatory. It is also an important way for you to keep learning and developing your skills and ensures that you practise safe and sound medicine.

“I hope you will always remain true to the ideals espoused in this solemn oath and put the interests of your patients before yourself.”

In this fast evolving healthcare landscape, knowledge and skills become outdated and obsolete very rapidly. There must be sustained and continual learning and upgrading of your skills and knowledge in your area of expertise. This is the only way that we can ensure we practise safe and effective Medicine.

The practice of Medicine today is extremely complex and multidisciplinary in nature, requiring a team effort. Your patients, especially the elderly ones, often suffer from several severe comorbidities making their management much more difficult. You will do well to work closely with your colleagues in the other disciplines to manage your patients holistically.

Medical Professionalism

The Council’s objective is to protect the health and safety of the public by upholding high standards of practice and maintaining public trust and confidence in the medical profession. We cannot do this alone and we need you to work with us to maintain the reputation of the profession. As you take these solemn words of the Pledge today, you must remember to honour and live by its principles and let them guide you through your entire career. Uphold the highest standards of professionalism and conduct.

Communication is a vital skill in patient-doctor relationship. Communication (or the lack of) is often the cause of problems that we see from the cases surfaced to the Council. This can easily be avoided through good and effective communications. I hope that you will continue to develop your soft skills in listening, understanding and empathising with your patient’s condition and concerns. Discuss with your patients in detail the proposed treatment plans and explain to them the benefits and the risk in ways that they can understand very clearly. Even if you don’t know all the answers, you can still work with your senior doctors and other healthcare colleagues so that you can provide your patients with comprehensive and useful information. Be always courteous, engaged and sincere in your conversations with patients and this will help you in building satisfying and professional patient-doctor relationship.

Ethical & Moral Standards

The medical profession is guided by a set of high ethical and moral standards which you must abide at all times. Your behavior and conduct, both in and outside of your practice must be exemplary and be a shining role model to your colleagues. You will do well to familiarise yourself with SMC’s Ethical Code & Ethical Guidelines (ECEG) which will serve to guide you throughout your career, especially in areas which you are not familiar.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to leave you with this quotation from American physician Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau:

“To cure sometimes, To relieve often, To comfort always

I would like to congratulate all of you on taking this Pledge today and welcome you into the profession. I hope you will always remain true to the ideals espoused in this solemn oath and put the interests of your patients before yourself.

It now gives me great pleasure to welcome Mr Gan Kim Yong to address us.
It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the Singapore Medical Council Pledge Affirmation Ceremony. This is a time for you to celebrate with family and friends your progress towards full professional registration as doctors.

The challenge for healthcare in the coming decades

We know that here in Singapore, seniors over the age of 65 will more than double from 430,000 today to over 900,000 in 2030. This implies a manifold increase in the demand for healthcare services. As admission rates and average length of stay rises, we will need to build more capacity, especially in community hospitals to manage those who need a longer time for recovery, rather than to keep them in our acute hospitals.

At the same time, we will have to continuously innovate to improve the health of our seniors and prevent hospitalisation as far as possible. This is the challenge that all of us face in our daily work. We must invest in health promotion to prevent or delay disease, and in primary care to diagnose disease early, manage it well or slow down its progression. We will need more “generalist doctors” to anchor patient care. This means more family physicians and more General Internal Medicine specialists. We hope that many of you here will aspire towards these areas of care.

If we in Singapore wish to be healthy and to stay healthy as we age, our healthcare system must transform to meet these needs. We need an effective and efficient model of care, one that is integrated with the community. You will all be involved in this transformation of care to achieve better outcomes.

Changing Care Models in our hospitals

An MOH Steering Committee on the development of General Medicine led by Prof Fong Kok Yong of Singapore General Hospital highlighted the concern of increasing fragmentation of healthcare in our hospitals. They felt that reorganisation of the hospital service was necessary for the transformation of care to improve patient safety and quality of care. They recommended the introduction of Acute Medical Hubs in general hospitals to manage acute undifferentiated medical cases. After management by trained general Internal Medicine physicians, such cases can then be discharged home or referred to the community services or to other specialty wards for follow-up if continuing medical specialist management is required. This way, patients can be more effectively managed, avoid unnecessary transfers and shorten their length of stay in the hospitals.

To support the development of General Medicine or Internal Medicine, we have increased training positions for Advanced Internal Medicine in our hospitals to augment the General Medicine service. Internal Medicine was made integral to specialty training in many related specialties.

We are also integrating hospital, primary care, intermediate and long-term care and the community through the Regional Health Systems or RHS. Primary care is not just first-line care; it also provides continuity of care throughout the patient’s life cycle.

As healthcare professionals, you can take advantage of training opportunities in these areas to equip you for the healthcare landscape of the future. Broad-based specialist or Family Medicine training will produce the healthcare practitioners and leaders to meet Singapore’s needs in future. To encourage the development of broad-based skills, the National Committee for the Health Manpower Development Plan or HMDP has recommended that all those who embark on such fellowship training have at least two years of broad specialty exposure as a specialist before they subspecialise. This has been adopted in our hospitals and institutions. Many of our institutions have developed their expertise and international standing and are able to provide local HMDP training opportunities.

Ethics and Professionalism

Today as you recite your pledge, you have solemnly promised to dedicate your life to the service of humanity. I believe the words you say are not hollow promises but done with all sincerity and with professional honour when you set your heart to be a doctor. I laud the Singapore Medical Council for ensuring that every fully registered doctor takes the pledge and honours it. Without strong ethics and professionalism, the trust the public has in the healthcare profession would be undermined. Our Professional Boards must therefore continue to uphold strong ethics and professionalism.

“Today as you recite your pledge, you have solemnly promised to dedicate your life to the service of humanity.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my hope that this pledge will continue to be your guiding light throughout your professional life. I congratulate you for taking this pledge today and wish you a happy and fulfilling career ahead. Thank you.
SMC Physician’s Pledge Affirmation Ceremony 2015

SMC held the second Physician’s Pledge Affirmation Ceremony for the year at the National University of Singapore Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music on 19 September 2015. The pledge ceremony marks an important milestone in the careers of doctors at the threshold of obtaining full registration status. The pledge is a solemn oath which reminds doctors of their duties and responsibilities to patients and society. The Minister for Health, Mr Gan Kim Yong, was our Guest of Honour and delivered the keynote address at the event. More than 300 doctors took the Physician’s Pledge witnessed by family and friends.
In Conversation With A/Prof Chen Fun Gee

“We have to always remember that we are here so that patients can feel better and get better.”

SMC News interviewed our Council member, A/Prof Chen Fun Gee, Director, Division of Graduate Medical Studies at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine to find out more about him and get his views on the medicine and the profession.

1. What brought you into the field of medicine?

To be honest I did not make up my mind to do medicine until I did National Service. It was a possible career, but I felt I would not be able to meet the demands of being a doctor. I saw the influence of the camp Medical Officer (MO) on the soldiers. I was also very impressed by my general practitioner, who seemed to know everything just by asking a few questions. Medicine was an aspirational career. An aspiration became reality, and I am very glad that I was given this opportunity and privilege.

2. What is your best memory of being a doctor in practice?

There have been many good memories. One very memorable event was when I was in the Navy after finishing housemanship and OCS training. I was the medical officer on board a landing ship tank. There was a bomb threat when we were sailing in the South China Sea, to a destination four days away. In the process of security clearance, the petty officer of the ship unwittingly put his hand into an air-conditioning fan and his thumb was macerated. I spent the whole night stitching the tissues together assisted by a medic done under local anaesthesia. By the time we reached the destination port, the wound was healing well and the hospital upon review there did not do anything more. When we got back to Singapore, he still had some stiffness of the thumb but it had otherwise returned to almost full function. This was back in 1982, and the ship had no X-rays and the entire diagnosis was made clinically. I was very glad for the training I had received as a house officer in Orthopaedics SGH.

3. How can doctors equip themselves better to function in an increasingly complex and intertwined ecosystem?

In an increasingly complex system, it is important to always remember the basics of medicine in particular, good communication and professionalism. Whilst the internet allows us to keep updated more easily, it has also resulted in an overload of information, some of which are read also by our patients. Thus in today’s practice, not only does one have to keep up to date, but also what is out there in the internet so that we can answer the patient’s concerns.

4. How can doctors ensure they uphold medical professionalism as societal expectations rise in general?

We have to always remember that we are here so that patients can feel better and get better. Everything else is secondary. I believe that this moral compass is the main guiding principle to medical professionalism.

5. Could you tell us something about yourself that not many people may know?

I like making things with my hands. I like working with electronics as well as wood. My most memorable success was making a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar imitation with upgraded electronics. I was very pleased that it impressed even my guitar teacher who is one of the leading jazz guitarists in Singapore.

6. Who or what has inspired you most in your career and life?

There were many luminaries but the most influential would have to be Professor Seah Cheng Siang. I was taught by him as a medical student and I was his house officer. He is a perfect example of what it means to be a doctor. He had great diagnostic skills, and investigations were just to confirm his diagnosis and not to find a diagnosis. I learned how important it was to acquire these skills and it has helped me in my current specialty practice.
Tips on beating the CME rush -
by Dr Leong Choon Kit, SMC Council member and Family Physician

It is almost time to renew our practising certificate.

It is also the time when many of us are in a flurry to chalk up our Continuing Medical Education (CME) points. There are, however, the few of us who are calm. Not because we are exempted from CME points, rather it is because we have developed a system of accumulating CME points to spare us the unnecessary heart-stopping and teeth-clenching last minute rush to meet the CME deadline.

This biannual excitement is particularly challenging for those of us who are General Practitioners (GPs) in the private sector. Let me share with you about the system I have evolved over the years and see if it helps you too.

Strategy One - Work First Rest Later
Our CME obligation spans over two years. I prefer the “work first rest later” method. I consciously choose to chalk up close to 50 points in my first year. That way, I will not have to worry about points at all in my second year.

The reverse does not appeal to me. I believe all of us have enough stress every day and do not need the extra stress caused by the deadline.

Strategy Two - Go for those high yield CME events
In order to chalk up points rapidly, I usually choose those which give me a lot of points. I highly recommend the skills courses conducted by the College of Family Physicians Singapore (CFPS). Each course gives the attendees 6 points over a weekend and another 6 points if we answer the multiple choice questions (MCQs) by the deadline. That gives us a total of 12 points over 2 days.

CFPS usually conducts 4 such courses a year and these courses are free for members. The details for these courses are published in their newsletter, College Mirror and on their website.

Alternatively, we can also chalk up many points by attending conferences locally and overseas. One such conference for GPs is the annual Primary Care Forum within the Singapore Health Biomedical Congress (SHBC) organised by the National Healthcare Group (NHG). Other Regional Health Systems (RHS) also organise similar conferences yearly and it is not difficult for private GPs to ask for sponsors.

Strategy Three - Speak, Teach or Present Papers
There are many opportunities for GPs to speak at CME events together with our specialist colleagues offering the primary care views and approach on the same subject. These speaking engagements give more points than just attending.

Teaching can be part of a GP’s scope of work. If one is engaged in teaching or tutoring Family Medicine residents and trainees, especially in the postgraduate courses, it allows us to accumulate many points a year too.

Presenting papers ties in together with research which is less common for most of us in the private sector. However, it is one avenue to consider if we have the right support.

Strategy Four - Read, Write or Review Papers
As we prepare to speak or teach, very often we need to read up many papers as part of our preparation. Most of the time, we forget to submit these for CME points. It is a good reminder that our CME system allows us to claim up to a maximum of 10 points over 2 years under category 3A for approved journals.

Strategy Five - Distance Learning
Finally, a very useful category is distance learning. This is particularly attractive to our younger colleagues who use the Internet for medical research and information often.

Conclusion
As usual, several of my classmates are now struggling to meet the CME submission deadline. We dissected their predicament and learnt a few more points for fellow GPs to take note.

1. CME points can be credited late because of various reasons. So it is important to complete them way ahead of time to allow the organisers sufficient time for submission.

2. Many colleagues did not check their latest CME status. It is useful to check online regularly.

3. There is a differentiation of core and non-core points. This pertains especially to those who are on the Register for Family Physicians. So it is important for us to make sure we have sufficient core points in Family Medicine.

4. There are a few new GPs who were previously pursuing other specialties. They will need to obtain core points in both their registered specialty and Family Medicine.

5. It is important to remember that practising without a valid practising certificate is an offence. So, for whatever reason our practising certificate is not ready, it is prudent to engage a locum or just close our clinics till we have a valid certificate.

Hopefully, when the next deadline comes for renewing our practising certificate, we will all have a calmer time.
Outcome of SMC Election 2015

The Singapore Medical Council (SMC) had scheduled to hold an election from 22 October 2015 to 5 November 2015 to fill three positions in the Medical Council.

As the number of candidates was the same as the number of vacancies to be filled, the candidates were declared to be elected, and no election was held this year.

The elected members are:

a) Dr Anantharaman Venkataraman;
b) Dr Chuang Wei Ping; and
c) Dr Tay Boon Keng.

The above elected members of the Medical Council will serve for a term of three (3) years with effect from 21 November 2015.

Practising Certificates (PCs) Renewal Exercise For 2016

Doctors who wish to renew their PCs will be able to login to the SMC’s website at www.smc.gov.sg to submit their PC renewal application 3 months before their existing PCs expire on 31 December 2016.

**PC Renewal Criteria**

To renew his PC in 2016, the doctor must fulfil the following:
- Has obtained sufficient CME points within the qualifying period; and
- Must not have any outstanding fine for not voting in previous SMC’s Elections (only applicable for fully registered doctors).

**Examples on qualifying period:**

Where the doctor’s existing 2-year PC is valid from 1 Jan 2015 to 31 Dec 2016; any CME points accrued for approved CME activities during the qualifying period between 1 Jan 2015 and 31 Dec 2016 can be counted towards his PC renewal.

Where the doctor’s existing 1-year PC is valid from 1 Jan 2016 to 31 Dec 2016; any CME points accrued for approved CME activities during the qualifying period between 1 Jan 2016 and 31 Dec 2016 can be counted for his PC renewal.

**Cessation of hardcopy renewal notice w.e.f. 1 Jan 2016**

With effect from 1 January 2016, the Singapore Medical Council will cease the sending of hardcopy notices to doctors for PC Renewal. Doctors will be notified via email when their PCs are due for renewal. As such, doctors are strongly urged to keep SMC updated of their email addresses.

Thank you.