



## **SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **DISCIPLINARY INQUIRY FOR DR THAM PAK ONN**

1. A Disciplinary Committee (DC) Inquiry was held against Dr Tham Pak Onn ("Dr Tham"), aged 72 years on 28 June 2010. The proceedings arose out of a complaint to the Singapore Medical Council (SMC). At the time of the complaint, Dr Tham was practising at Tham Dispensary located at 580 Geylang Road Singapore 389520.
2. Dr Tham pleaded guilty to 7 charges of professional misconduct for failing to exercise due care in the management and/or treatment of his patients with hypnotics.
3. The charges included (a) inappropriate prescription of hypnotics to the patients; (b) failure to refer the patients to a medical specialist for further assessment and treatment; (c) failure to record or document in the patients' Patient Medical Records details or sufficient details of the patients' diagnosis, symptoms and/or condition except for the initial consultation; and/or (d) failure to formulate any long term management plan for the treatment of the patients' respective medical conditions.
4. In arriving at its decision, the DC considered the fact that long term consumption of hypnotics may lead to drug dependence. Hence the DC stated that it was the duty of all doctors to be familiar with and to understand current medical standards and prescribing practices in the interests of their patients, and that it was crucial for doctors to formulate a long term management plan to minimize the possibility of creating dependency on such medication in these patients.
5. The DC stated that Dr Tham had acted in disregard of his professional duties since the prolonged prescription of hypnotics without specialist referral or proper medical records was inappropriate and unprofessional.

6. The DC also pointed out that it was important and in the interests of doctors to maintain patients' records, as ultimately these will form the primary evidence of the work and treatment by these doctors. Dr Tham's failure to maintain proper records in this case amounted to professional misconduct.
7. In making its decision, the DC also considered several mitigating factors, including the fact that (a) Dr Tham faced relatively few charges; (b) he had pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity and had cooperated with the authorities; (c) he had voluntarily ceased practice in February 2008; and (d) he is a senior member of the medical profession and had a long standing good record until these proceedings.
8. In the circumstances, taking the evidence and mitigating factors into consideration, the DC ordered that Dr Tham; (a) be fined the sum of \$4,000; (b) be censured; (c) give a written undertaking to the Medical Council that he will not engage in the conduct complained of or any similar conduct; and (d) pay the costs and expenses of and incidental to these inquiry proceedings.
9. The DC also specifically mentioned that the sentence did not include a term of suspension which is the usual sentence for misconduct of improper prescription of hypnotics because of the strong mitigating factors in this case. As such, it should not be viewed that doctors convicted of improper prescription of hypnotics will only incur a fine.

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