



## **SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony, 28 September 2024**

The SMC held its second Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony for 2024 on 28 September at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore. A total of 516 doctors, most of whom were provisionally registered, took the Physician's Pledge. The Pledge reminded all new doctors of their responsibilities to their patients and to uphold high professional and ethical standards in their practice.

The Ceremony was attended by members of the Medical Council and distinguished guests from the medical professional bodies and healthcare institutions. The Guest-of-Honour for the Pledge was Dr Tan Wu Meng, Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health and Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC. Dr Tan is also a medical oncologist, practising at the National Cancer Centre Singapore.

10 doctors who were awarded the MOH National Outstanding Postgraduate Year 1 (PGY1) Award received their award from the Director-General of Health at the end of the ceremony. The award was for exceptional performance and leadership during their PGY1 training in 2023.



## **Speech by Guest-of-Honour Dr Tan Wu Meng**

### **Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health, and Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC**

Professor Chee Yam Cheng, President of the Singapore Medical Council, Council Members, colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to join you this afternoon for the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) Physician's Pledge Ceremony.

It is a special day — a special day in your professional lifetime, a milestone in your journey as doctors.

The oath which you will take shortly — it reflects the core values of our profession. Allegiance spoken out loud, regarding our dedication of service to humanity, gratitude and respect to our mentors, and to practising our profession with resolve and integrity.



## Healthcare. Changing.

All of us throughout our training have seen how the healthcare landscape is evolving, changing very rapidly in many developed countries.

One of the biggest concerns would be the challenges of an ageing population. To address this, MOH has implemented Healthier SG which many of you would have experienced and seen through your postings and your service. It is a national initiative; it is actually, a movement. We hope to shift the focus to preventive care so that healthcare also includes a greater emphasis on maintaining health as long as possible. And so we hope to help our fellow Singaporeans take up the responsibility to lead healthier lifestyles, and in turn reduce the burden — the burden of suffering — that chronic diseases bring to so many Singaporeans in later life.

As doctors, whether in training or seeing our colleagues' journeys, we know there are so many roles that we have at the same time. It is almost like juggling many roles at once: some of it is diagnosing, treating, looking after your patients holistically especially those with multiple medical conditions. And also looking out for the mental well-being and social needs of our patients, and all at the same time having to keep up to date with all the changes in healthcare — new knowledge, new technology, new change.



So at this juncture, with the permission of colleagues, if I may do a quick audience participation moment: Can we do a quick show of hands — How many have tried artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT? This is not an exam question, there is no right or wrong answer. How many of you have tried image generators: Midjourney, Stable Diffusion? I know some of us have again.

But the point is: these are questions we would not have asked or been able to ask just five or even 10 years ago.

### **AI and Healthcare: What changes? What stays the same?**

So the world is changing. AI is changing many industries including healthcare, and so we may often ask ourselves: In a world with AI, what changes for us as doctors? What stays the same?

So if I can suggest, what cannot and should not change must be the human aspect.

We cannot predict what AI apps will be 20 years from now, or how medical practice will be changed 20 years from now, but let me suggest three thoughts for us to consider.

**And in this, I speak as a doctor and as your professional colleague.**

**I also speak as someone who has been admitted to hospital as a patient.**

**I speak as someone who has loved ones who were ill.**

**I speak as someone who has lost loved ones to illness.**

So first of these three points is **the human touch**. Not just because spoken words and the human touch bring comfort to your patients in time of distress, but also because every patient in their heart wants to know it is a human being — a real person delivering that care to them.

Second, **the humanity of the doctor-patient relationship**. Because ultimately it is a relationship between two human beings, between people.

And thirdly, the value of **human wisdom**. Because we know medical practice is a human endeavour — that is what sets aside our day-to-day practice from a textbook or a research paper. It is a human endeavour, with human judgement involved in medical care. And where there is human judgement there has to be a role for human wisdom.

So do not lose sight of these principles. **Because even in a world with AI, our practice of medicine is still fundamentally about people.**

*People in sickness and in health.*

*People with hopes and fears.*

*People who may be going through some of the darkest, most difficult moments of their lives.*

It is also about people like you and me, working on the healthcare front line, trying to help our fellow human beings.



## **Human trust. Patients and profession. Profession and society.**

Let me touch on human trust which is so fundamental to our profession.

All the three principles I mentioned help build our patients' trust, and also deepen the trust we have between one another as professional colleagues.

There is also another dimension of trust, which is trust between our profession and society as a whole.

We often speak of our professional licence, our licence to practice. But our profession itself has a licence to exist — it is a social licence that society confers upon us, the social licence to be a profession that self-regulates.

And that trust is the foundation of our social license as a profession. That trust is something which many generations of doctors have built up over decades — more than 100 years in Singapore. And in each generation we continue to build it and feel that responsibility to build it.



## Our teachers and mentors

Let me also speak to our mentors and on the wisdom of experience. In the Physician's Pledge which we will recite later together, it says that we are "to give due respect and gratitude to our teachers".

To our mentors and more senior colleagues, and I see some of you here today in the audience: I thank you for being so patient with us and guiding us, when my peers and I were your housemen and medical officers.

In those days we may have been "blur like *sotong*", but hopefully with experience, we may someday approach your wisdom and your experience.

And to our mentors: I hope that you continue to be involved in medical education, teaching lessons which cannot be found in a textbook. Lessons which cannot easily be tested in a structured exam. Teaching this to the next generation of doctors.

These lessons include those of experience, the nuances of bedside manner, the art of bedside communication.





And often this is found in stories of real life experiences — sometimes better conveyed through oral history, apprenticeship, mentoring a trainee whether in the ward, in the operating theatre, or in the Houseman Canteen or the equivalent canteen today.

These are lessons which cannot be found in a textbook and yet are so important to any doctor's practice.

That combination of life experience, clinical seniority — it is a precious resource. And I hope that you, our seniors and mentors, will continue drawing upon this and continue being involved in education to lift up younger colleagues.

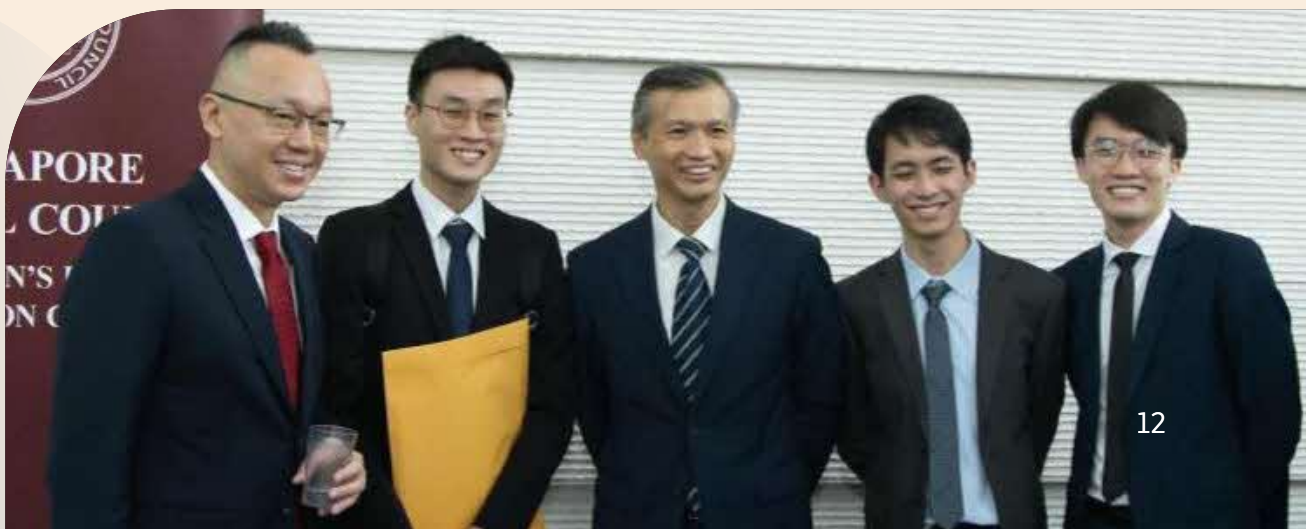
### **Our young colleagues: tomorrow's mentors**

Let me also focus on our young colleagues because you are tomorrow's mentors.

To our young friends, young colleagues today: We know the journey ahead can be hard and daunting.

We know that being a house officer today is very different from what my generation went through, from what my mentors went through, from what their mentors went through. It has changed.

But **just because a challenge has a different character amidst a different landscape does not mean it is any less challenging in its own way.**





I spoke earlier about technology and AI. Today we are already grappling with IT and the complexities of technology, user interface, user experience. And we know that as society evolves, so do social compacts including the perceptions, the expectations of that social compact: between doctors and patients; profession and society.

So at every level of training, every phase of your journey, as you grow as a doctor and you grow more senior, never forget what you found hardest in the early phase of your clinical journey. Never forget what you found hardest as a houseman, as a medical officer, as a trainee.

Because **by remembering what you found hardest, it will help you be a force for change** to support your juniors, to make it better for the next generation, so that patient care and patient safety can continue to improve.



## Life experience

To all colleagues and peers present here: Just as each patient has their history, their story, we know each of you has a story as well. Each of us has a story, our own personal journey and life experience, including ups and downs.

Life experience is never wasted experience, whether in medicine or life.

I have met fellow Singaporeans who speak of how patients can sense in a positive way without finding the words, how patients can sense whether the person caring for them has life experience. Whether the caregiver, the care provider has ever been a patient themselves, worried about whether a diagnosis might ruin their life, whether they may have to rebuild after a serious illness, or someone who's lost a loved one.

We do not wish for anyone to go through setbacks and heartbreak, but I say to you: If you are going through or have gone through a rough patch in life, it is part of your own journey — and know that in time it is possible to draw strength from it, and in some way your patients can and will sense that too. And they can sense it in a way that deepens how they connect with you.



## Drawing on the full breadth of life experience and talent that is Singapore

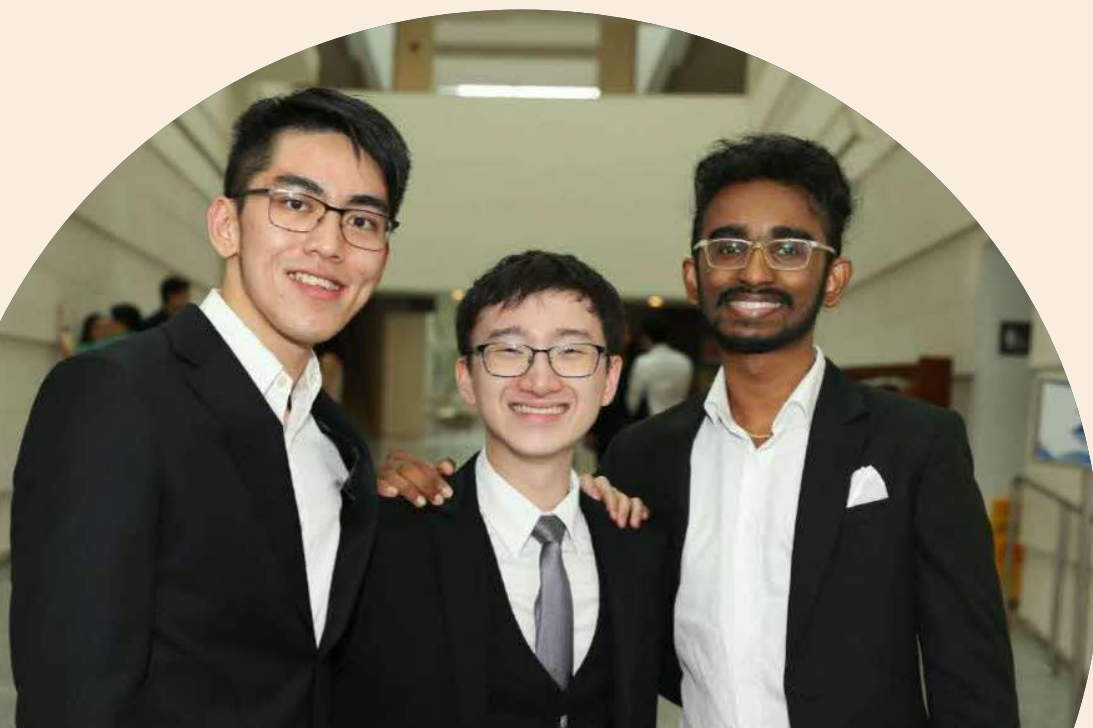
We are on the healthcare front line, caring for patients from all walks of life; serving, caring, looking after our community.

And so let me suggest that means **we must continue drawing doctors from the community, from all walks of life too.**

So we should keep on making every effort, in every generation, to ensure that diversity of backgrounds and journeys, in our healthcare workforce, in our medical profession, at every level in every time and in every phase of the journey.

These include:

- The colleague whose life took a detour but is now back with us, serving together with us.
- The colleague who had to walk so much further just to get to the starting line.
- The colleague who may have taken a different path, and who thereby brings a different perspective of Singapore life.





Each of our stories, each of your stories adds to the team, strengthens the team — because healthcare is fundamentally a human endeavour.

And **when our profession draws on the full breadth of life experience and talent, that is Singapore, it helps our healthcare system.** It makes the system stronger and it strengthens our ability to deliver care.

### **The kind of care we would want for our loved ones**

In closing, this ceremony is a milestone in your professional life as a doctor.

Life will have its ups and downs, but always remember the human touch, our shared humanity and the value of human wisdom.

It is part of how we keep steadfast in our calling, and make sure that we can **deliver care to patients which is the kind of care we would want for our loved ones.**

Many congratulations and may you have a successful and fulfilling career in the years ahead.

Thank you.





## **Speech by Professor Chee Yam Cheng**

### **President of Singapore Medical Council**

Dr Tan Wu Meng, Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health, Fellow Council Members, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I thank you for joining us today as we witness our colleagues taking the Physician's Pledge. It gives me great pleasure to welcome our Guest-of-Honour, Dr Tan Wu Meng, Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health, and Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC.



The majority of our colleagues here are first year medical professionals. Being in the PGY1 year, you have just begun practice in the profession and a bright future awaits you. Being registered by the Singapore Medical Council as provisionally or conditionally registered doctors, you will eventually progress to become fully registered doctors. The jurisdiction of the Singapore Medical Council in relation to you as registered medical practitioners is governed by the Medical Registration Act, the Medical Registration Regulations and the relevant guidelines.

The ethical standards in your practice and your behaviour as doctors are guided by the SMC Ethical Code and the Ethical Guidelines known in short as the ECEG. The ECEG was developed after consultations with the medical profession and encapsulates the ethical and professional standards expected of medical doctors by your own professional peers as well as by the public.







The Medical Council received a total of 88 new complaints against 100 medical practitioners in 2023. This is a very small number considering that there were more than 17,000 doctors on our register at the end of 2023.

The SMC Annual Report each year categorises the complaints against doctors to the Council. The larger or largest categories of complaints concerned excessive and inappropriate prescription of drugs specifically hypnotics and codeine containing cough mixtures; unnecessary and inappropriate medical treatment, rudeness, attitude and communication issues and professional negligence and incompetence. It is an educational exercise for us to read through the summaries of cases in the SMC Annual Report.

It is also good for us to read through the judgements on doctors by your peers in the disciplinary tribunals and by the High Court in the appeals by convicted doctors.

Many of those who were convicted by their peers and the High Court did not take sufficient care of their patients to maintain integrity, competency, professionalism and the appropriate practice. Some could be motivated by avarice or were misled and over the years developed an uncompassionate, uncaring and indifferent attitude or they may have provided incompetent and inappropriate care to their patients.

All of us need to improve and update our practice. Being entrusted with the well-being and lives of those who seek healing and health care comes with a responsibility that cannot be taken lightly. We must provide a standard of medical care that is ethical, rational and based on a balance of evidence and accepted good clinical practice.

I encourage you to read the disciplinary cases published on the SMC website. Understanding the grounds of decisions for concluded disciplinary cases provide us a better awareness and help us avoid pitfalls in our practice.

The Pledge you are about to undertake is not merely a procedural requirement under the Medical Registration Act prior to being fully registered.

The life and well-being of patients under our care are our responsibility and the Pledge reminds us of our commitment to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, ethical practice and patient care at all times.

You will in the Pledge taking state that you will comply with the provisions of the Ethical Code. One can only comply when he or she knows the Ethical Code. Hence it is important to read and understand the Ethical Code.



In my last speech in the SMC Pledge Ceremony in February this year, I spoke about Medical Ethics CME being made mandatory for doctors who will be accumulating CME points for the renewal of their practising certificate at the end of next year (2025). Mandatory Medical Ethics or MME was recommended by the MOH Workgroup which reviewed the taking of Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process.

One of the recommendations in the Workgroup's Report stated that there was a low take-up rate for medical education on medical ethics for the general population of doctors as such courses were not compulsory. Core points for CME were only awarded for clinical updates within the specialty.

There was therefore 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.

The details of the requirements have been circulated to all doctors via the SMC Circular in January this year, and updates are communicated through [announcements on the SMC website](#) or the [SMC newsletter](#).





The SMC newsletter is published three times a year and contains news and updates of importance to all doctors. This includes the renewal of practising certificates and compulsory voting in the election for Council members. In the most recent editions there were also articles on how to better manage stress at work and build harmonious workplace relationships. A write-up on propriety and sexual boundaries in a doctor's practice and personal conduct was also published.

I come now to the National Outstanding PGY1 Award, an annual award presented by the Ministry of Health to recognise PGY1 medical graduates who have consistently exhibited excellence in the PGY1 training programme.

Professor Kenneth Mak, the Director-General of Health who is also the Registrar of SMC will be presenting the awards to 10 doctors from the 2023 cohort who were chosen for their outstanding performance, commendable leadership and interpersonal and clinical skills throughout their 12-month training. They are commended in the presence of you all, the succeeding cohort of PGY1s, to remind us that professionalism and qualities aligned to the ECEG are indeed appreciated and lauded.



In closing, I congratulate all of you for your achievement after many years of study and hard work to embark on this career as a medical doctor. It is a notable achievement which you must cherish and value. Let me quote from the ECEG:

**"As a member of the medical profession you are held in the highest esteem by the public and society, who depend on a reliable and trustworthy healthcare system and look to you for the relief of their suffering and ailments. Much trust is vested in you to do your best by both. This trust is contingent on maintaining the highest standards of professional practice and conduct. You must therefore strive to continually strengthen the trust that has been bestowed."**

Together we all can shape the future of healthcare and make a difference in the lives of those we serve. I wish you all an ethical and fulfilling medical career ahead.

Thank you.

