

# SMC

## Newsletter



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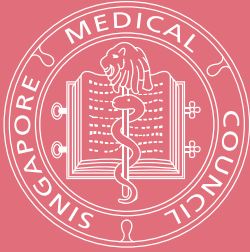


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25<sup>TH</sup> EDITION



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FROM THE DESK OF  
PROF. CHEE YAM CHENG

## SMC President's Message

Dear colleagues,

In October last year, the [National Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy \(2023\)](#) was launched in Singapore. The Strategy aims to create an effective mental health ecosystem comprising accessible and good quality clinical care with a supportive community and society. It is good for us to visit the MOH website at the link above to be aware of this important national strategy.

### **Enhanced Communication and Support for Doctors who Disclose Mental Health Conditions to SMC**

Doctors are not spared; healthcare professionals and doctors also experience mental health issues which may be triggered or exacerbated by stress in the workplace. In this edition of the newsletter, we share the steps taken by SMC to enhance the communication of its policies regarding the declaration of mental health conditions and support for affected doctors.

The intent of disclosure is that doctors who need help in the workplace should seek help and treatment, and follow-up where indicated. However, if there is no longer any issue, or remission was already achieved a long while ago, the doctor can go back to functioning as usual, and the declaration is no longer required.

### **Coping with Mental Stress at Work: Individual Stress Management and Building Harmonious Workplace Relationships**

Amid the demands and responsibilities required of doctors, it is important to prioritise personal mental wellness. Adj A/Prof Lee Cheng, Psychiatrist and Senior Consultant at the Institute of Mental Health has contributed an article to this newsletter. He shares tips on coping with mental stress at work and the importance of building harmonious workplace relationships. I take this opportunity to thank Adj A/Prof Lee Cheng for contributing this article on stress management.

### **Renewal of Practising Certificates**

Lastly, the renewal of Practising Certificates (PC) will start on 2 September till 31 December 2024. For those whose PCs are expiring at the end of this year, please ensure that you have obtained sufficient Continuing Medical Education (CME) points before you submit your application. Do submit early and at least one month before your PC expires so as not to incur a late application fee.



**Professor Chee Yam Cheng**  
**President**



## Enhanced Communication and Support for Doctors who Disclose Mental Health Conditions to SMC

In December 2021, the Ministry of Health established the National Wellness Committee for Junior Doctors (NWC-JD) with the aim of reviewing and recommending changes to existing healthcare practices and guidelines to ensure the well-being of junior doctors. The committee has completed its review, and relevant feedback and concerns of junior doctors were shared with the Singapore Medical Council (SMC).

During the engagement sessions with doctors, one of the concerns raised was the uncertainty surrounding the disclosure of mental health conditions to SMC during their application for registration or Practising Certificate (PC) renewal. The doctors expressed a lack of clarity regarding SMC's reasons for requesting this information and the subsequent process following the declaration.

After considering and reviewing the feedback from the doctors, SMC took steps to enhance the communication of its policies regarding the declaration of mental health conditions. The objective is to provide transparency, clarity, and assurance to the affected doctors.

The key measures that have been, or will be, implemented are as follows:

**a) Dedicated webpage and FAQs on declaration of mental health conditions:**

Since March this year, SMC has introduced a new section “Fitness to Practise (Health)” on its website ([link](#)). This dedicated webpage and the accompanying Frequently Asked Questions ([link](#)) aim to explain and make clearer the reasons for declaring health conditions and outline the subsequent process. A similar section has been created for doctors applying for PC.

**b) Dedicated personnel to assist the doctor who has declared a mental health condition:**

SMC has implemented a system where a dedicated personnel will be assigned to each doctor who has declared a mental health condition. This personnel will reach out to the doctor, address his/her queries relating to the application process, and manage the doctor’s application until the outcome from SMC is issued.

**c) Amendments to the health declaration questions in PRS:**

SMC will be amending the health declaration questions in the Professional Registration System (PRS) to exclude past medical history that the doctor no longer suffers from, and to only include present history. The declaration questions will also include footnotes to assist doctors when making their declarations. Work is currently in progress to implement these amendments to the health declaration questions in the PRS. SMC hopes that, with this change, any unintended associated stigma will be removed from those who have already recovered from their mental health conditions.

SMC has an obligation to ensure that doctors provide safe medical and professional care to the public. As such, SMC requires doctors to voluntarily report to them if they discover that their health conditions (including mental health conditions) would impair their fitness to practise and provide safe care. This is a requirement under the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines. SMC hopes that, with the above measures, the communications surrounding the declaration on mental health conditions will be improved, and the affected doctors will receive greater support during their application process.



# Coping with Mental Stress at Work: Individual Stress Management and Building Harmonious Workplace Relationships



**Adjunct Associate Professor Lee Cheng, JP**

Psychiatrist

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Appointed Member, Singapore Medical Council

According to the National Population Health Survey 2022, the prevalence of poor mental health among Singapore residents has risen from 13.4 percent in 2020 to 17 percent in 2022. Recently, we have noted increasing public awareness of mental health issues.

However mental health issues do not just affect the general population; doctors and healthcare professionals also experience high levels of stress due to work which may affect their mental well-being.



## Identifying Causes of Stress

There are two forms of stress: external and internal. External stress may be due to various reasons such as studies, work, family, relationships, grief, retirement and financial issues. This is often exacerbated by a lack of or poor communication and guidance. For junior doctors, this can be particularly challenging, especially if it is related to work and organisational changes such as promotion, departmental restructuring, transfer and dismissal. Sometimes, unreasonable demands and verbal/physical abuse from patients and their caregivers can also add to workplace stress.

On the other hand, causes of internal stress include hereditary factors, personality traits and subjective thinking. For example, one may be impatient and want to do many things at once, while another could be overly cautious and slow to act; one may appear calm and composed but is actually feeling anxious, while another may express their anxiety outwardly.

The Stress-Vulnerability Theory informs us that an individual will only develop a mental health condition if the stress he faces exceeds his biological vulnerability level.



We can look out for the following symptoms of stress:



**Physical:** fatigue, palpitations, body aches



**Psychological:** poor concentration, irritability, tearfulness, worry, anxiety



**Behavioural:** poor appetite, increased alcohol consumption and smoking, insomnia, restlessness, lack of sexual libido, and even violent tendencies



**Cognitive:** indecisiveness, inattentiveness, negative thinking, and self-blame



## Coping with Stress

Since stress is prevalent and we face challenges in our everyday life, my advice would be to learn how to cope with stress in a positive manner.



Recognise the symptoms and causes of stress, and understand one's own limits. Know yourself well and do not make too many changes at the same time.



Adopt a healthy lifestyle—exercise regularly, have ample sleep, decrease your intake of caffeine and sugary food, quit smoking and avoid excessive alcohol consumption. Breathing and muscle relaxation techniques can also help.



Manage time effectively. Remember, not all tasks are both important and urgent; nonetheless, we should avoid procrastination as cutting close to deadlines may cause further stress.



Build a strong and wide social network. I would suggest speaking to a loved one (a family member or trusted friend/colleague) and your superiors for help.



Seek professional mental health assistance when necessary.



## **Building harmonious workplace relationships**

Let us now focus on work-related stress and how we can manage it.

In a healthcare setting, a doctor does not work alone. Doctors collaborate with a multidisciplinary team of colleagues with different backgrounds, work experiences and personalities. We dedicate an average of 50 hours per week to work. Hence, having good and close working relationships with colleagues and supervisors is important and essential for teamwork and productivity.

Let me elaborate further. Workplace relationships directly affect one's ability and performance and these relationships can be positive or negative. A positive workplace relationship leads to a more cohesive working environment and increased productivity as you feel positive, satisfied and committed to your work, while a negative workplace relationship leads to disengagement, dissatisfaction and hence poor work productivity.

Therefore, beyond the individual stress management, the following tips can help build positive relationships at work for doctors at all levels. Although this takes time and patience, it is worthwhile to invest energy in building these relationships:



**Communication:** All good relationships depend on open and honest communication involving active listening and attention to non-verbal cues such as body language. It is advisable to use clear and precise (but not too brief or curt) language to avoid misunderstanding, especially when we are sending text messages or replying to emails.



**Respect:** Allow a colleague to express their opinion before responding. A difference of opinion can often be useful as it might offer insight into something one had not thought of.



**Consistency:** Set clear expectations and consistent directions and messages—advice given must be thoughtful and practical.



**Trust:** Trust is reciprocal. We must always honour our promises and deliver our commitments. If we are unable to fulfil a promise, apologise and take responsibility instead of pushing the blame to others.



**Professionalism:** Always engage in professional behaviour and avoid gossip. If an individual has an issue with a colleague, he can approach the colleague to have a polite and honest conversation, and address the issue objectively. If necessary, seek the assistance of a superior to resolve the issue.



**Teamwork:** Work is interconnected, and if a staff member fails to meet deadlines and commitments, the work of other colleagues is also affected. Therefore, providing support to colleagues who are feeling stressed will help them stay positive and complete the task. This will also foster team spirit and cohesiveness.



**Praise:** Acknowledge staff contributions, give more praise and credit for their work, and offer valuable suggestions. This would boost staff morale in the department.

The last point to note is that when we implement organisational changes, it should be paced accordingly, and we should prepare affected staff so that they are ready for the new work and challenges.

**I am sure all will agree that everyone has their own talents, skills and experience. Respect and cherish one another so as to foster harmonious working relationships which will bring joy and success to ourselves and the organisation.**

# Practising Certificate (PC) Renewal for year 2025



## For Who and When?

For fully and conditionally registered doctors whose PCs are **expiring on 31 December 2024**.

## PC Renewal Criteria

- **Obtained sufficient Continuing Medical Education (CME) points\*.**
- **No outstanding fine for not voting in previous SMC Elections (applies to doctors on full registration only).**

**\*Doctors whose PCs are expiring on 31 December 2024 do not need to fulfil Mandatory Medical Ethics Core Points for PC Renewal for year 2025.**

Ensure that you have fulfilled your CME or CPE requirements before September 2024 to be able to apply for your PC for year 2025.

## How to Renew?

The application for renewal of PC starting next year 2025 will **commence from 2 September 2024 till 31 December 2024 (both dates inclusive)**.

Please ensure that you have sufficient CME points to renew your PC.

Please note that applications submitted on and after **1 December 2024** will be considered as late applications. A late application fee of \$80 will apply.

Therefore to avoid the late application fee, doctors need to **log into the Professional Registration System (PRS)** on the SMC [website](#) with their Singpass and 2-factor verification early or **at least one month** before their PC expires to apply for a renewal.

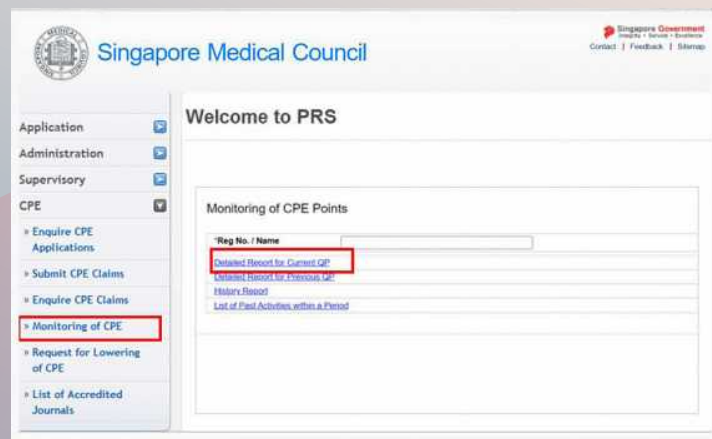
### Reminder

Doctors are reminded to log into the PRS to **update their contact details such as email addresses, handphone numbers and employment information** so as not to miss any important notifications from SMC.



# Checking your CME or CPE points

Doctors can check for CPE points under '**Detailed Report for Current QP**' after logging in to SMC's Professional Registration System (PRS) on the SMC [website](#) with their Singpass and 2-factor verification. Doctors may refer to the guide [here](#) on how to view the CPE reports\*\* and submit CPE claims.



\*\* CPE reports may require some time to be updated in the PRS, e.g. for claims which are pending SMC's review or pending submission of attendance by CME providers for CME events which have been recently completed.

**PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR CME POINTS EARLY!**



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