



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.

