



SMC

NEWSLETTER



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SMC President's Message



*D*ear colleagues,

In February, the SMC resumed the in-person Physician's Pledge Ceremony, the first since the pandemic hit us three years ago. We were happy to witness a total of 193 younger doctors taking the Physician's Pledge and to celebrate this milestone in their medical career with them. As we recited the Pledge, we were reminded of the fundamental reason of our lifelong calling as a doctor, and that is, to put the safety and well-being of patients as our first consideration.

In August 2022, we initiated the *Series in Professional Ethics* to highlight common ethical issues that may arise during medical practice and to offer some guidance on these issues. It began with the topic of "Propriety and Sexual Boundaries", where Guideline C4 of the 2016 Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines was referenced. In this issue, we remind doctors about how they are to conduct themselves when dealing with intimate examinations and some ways that they can go about assuring their patients.

In the last edition, we had announced that the SMC would be rolling out compulsory Continuing Medical Education (CME) requirements on Medical Ethics in 2026. The Medical Ethics CME programmes will be prepared and scheduled by the Academy of Medicine Singapore, College of Family Physicians Singapore and Singapore Medical Association from this year.

Professor Chee Yam Cheng
President

SMC Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

25 February 2023

The SMC resumed its in-person Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony on 25 February 2023 since the pandemic in 2020. The event, which was held at the *Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore*, saw 193 conditionally- and provisionally-registered doctors taking the Pledge, a milestone reached for them as medical professionals.

By taking the Physician's oath, doctors were reminded of their responsibilities to their patients as well as the importance of upholding high professional and ethical standards in their practice. The SMC was honoured to have Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for Health as the Guest-of-Honour for the event, as well as members of the Medical Council and invited guests from the medical professional bodies and Chairmen of Medical Boards of hospitals.





Speech by Guest of Honour Dr Janil Puthucheary

Senior Minister of State for Health

It is my privilege to join you today for the Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony. The pledge is an important milestone before you receive full registration as a medical doctor in Singapore. I echo the President's message that this may be one of the most important afternoons in your life.

Upholding professionalism even as we emerge from the pandemic

Many of you present today have stood on the frontlines of the pandemic over the last three years. You have worked hand in hand with other healthcare professionals and care staff to deliver the best possible care for your patients. Those were difficult times, but you persevered, despite the challenges and stressful conditions. This is a testament of your professionalism and dedication. You have placed the welfare and care of patients at the topmost of your minds and kept faith with your pledge to "dedicate your lives to the service of humanity".

... the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines provides the guiding principles for every doctor, at every stage of their medical career. It is imperative for doctors to read and familiarise ourselves with these guidelines...

The solemn oath you are about to undertake, affirms this dedication and the duties and responsibilities towards our patients, colleagues and all those who have put their trust in us. It is also your commitment to uphold the high professional and ethical standards expected of the medical profession. We should never take for granted the trust and confidence the public has placed in



the medical profession which has been painstakingly built up over the years. As a profession, we should continue to uphold high professional standards in three key areas.

First, we must prevent lapses in our professional standards which may arise in our clinical practice, such as failure to exercise a duty of care to our patients, poor clinical decision making that does not take into account our patients' best interest, or failing to maintain currency in our clinical knowledge and prescribing non-evidence based clinical treatments.



... we need to uphold the trust the public has placed on us by ensuring effective self-regulation.

We must behave with probity and integrity, and guard against personal indiscretion and other issues which may interfere with our professional standards. Our fitness to practise is as important as our physical and mental fitness.

Second, the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines provides the guiding principles for every doctor, at every stage of their medical career. It is imperative for doctors to read and familiarise ourselves with these guidelines which are part of the important reading materials hosted on the website of the Singapore Medical Council.

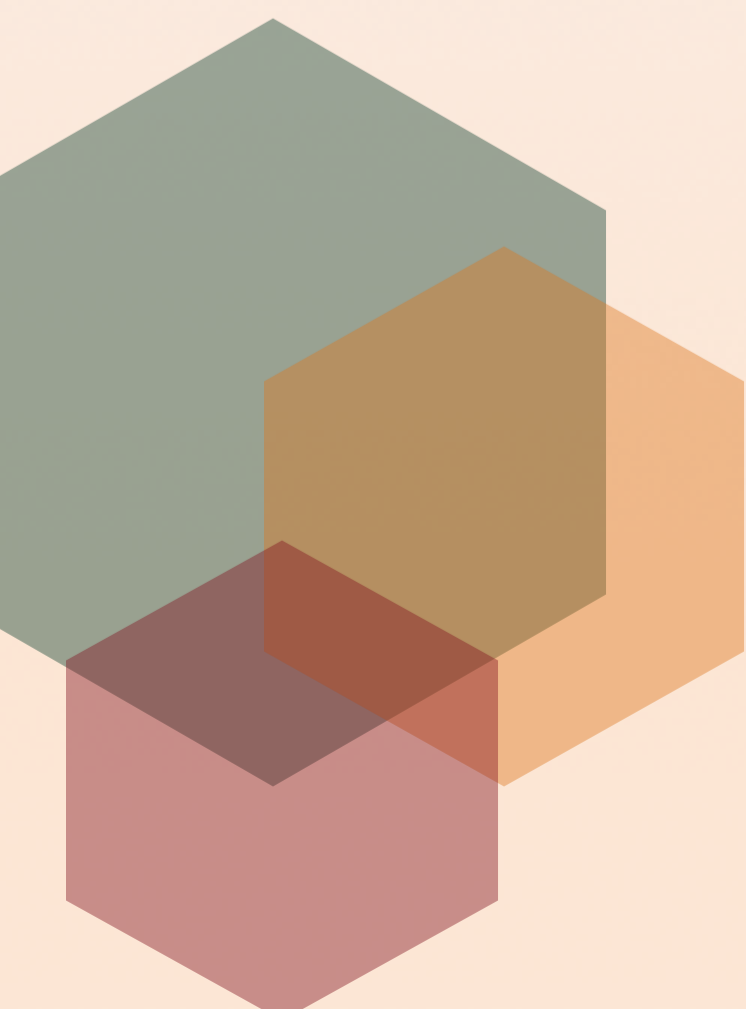
Third, self-regulation is a privilege, and we need to uphold the trust the public has placed on us by ensuring effective self-regulation. It is our hope that every cohort of doctors will produce the few who will step forward in enabling good self-regulation.



On this note, I wish to honour and thank the doctors, legal professionals and laypersons who have committed themselves to serve in the SMC Complaints Panel, alongside the Disciplinary Tribunals and the newly set up Disciplinary Commission, which work together to ensure effective self-regulation. To make judgements according to the Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines requires integrity, commitment, and wisdom, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the important work that is done by these individuals.

Care for Juniors

Even as we uphold the high professional standards expected of our profession, the strains of the pandemic have also highlighted the challenges faced by junior doctors. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is actively studying these issues, including areas such as duty hours, career pathways, and work processes. We are currently engaging doctors across all ranks on improvements that can be made to offer better support to junior doctors. At the same time, we are also working with educators and professional bodies to ensure that changes do not negatively impact training outcomes. More importantly, we should not forget that the medical fraternity has a responsibility to take care of their juniors, and take this duty seriously as a core undertaking of the profession.



Healthier SG

As we move towards normalcy, it is timely for us to rethink what healthcare should look like in a post-COVID world, taking the lessons learnt from our pandemic response while remaining committed to our vision of a healthier nation. The Healthier SG movement is crucial to this vision, and as doctors, you play a significant role in this. Many of you will be the first point of contact in caring for Singaporeans. You will thus play a pivotal role in helping Singaporeans take steps towards better health, shape healthy behaviours, as well as anchor care and support for Singaporeans in their homes and communities. I would like to encourage all of you to contribute to this movement in one way or another, where together we can be part of this movement for a healthier Singapore.



Closing Remarks

In closing, this ceremony marks a milestone in your journey as a doctor. I congratulate you and my hope for you is that you maintain a lifelong steadfastness in your dedication and commitment to your patients. Let me use this opportunity to wish you all the best as you continue to develop professionally. I wish you success, and a fulfilling life and career in the years ahead.

Thank you.

Speech by Professor Chee Yam Cheng President of SMC



Good afternoon. On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I warmly welcome and thank our Guest of Honour, Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State for Health, and our distinguished guests for being here. Together we welcome all our colleagues who are taking the Pledge today.

First let me congratulate you for reaching this significant stage in your career as a medical doctor. The Pledge you promise to do solemnly and freely and upon your honour, is also written into, and found in the Second Schedule of the Medical Registration Regulations.

The practice of Medicine is both challenging and rewarding. Medical practitioners can meet these challenges when we are trained not only in the skills of medicine but also in the ethics and professionalism that accompany these skills.

The Medical Registration Regulations in Section 16 requires all doctors who wish to be fully registered to undertake the Physician's Pledge on such day and time as may be specified by the Medical Council. Today's ceremony is such a day and time and is especially significant as the first in-person Pledge ceremony after the three years of online Pledges via Zoom in the preceding COVID-19 years from 2020 to 2022. We remember these extraordinary years and times and thank you for your perseverance and hard work through the pandemic.

Last year, 2022, was an eventful year for SMC's regulatory processes especially for the disciplinary processes. We started the year with e-certs i.e. the e-Registration Certificates and e-Practising Certificates as well as the digital PC in the Singpass app in your smartphones. In the middle of the year in June 2022, the Emotional Support Programme for doctors who



faced disciplinary inquiries was started by the three medical professional bodies, the Academy of Medicine Singapore or AMS, the College of Family Physicians Singapore or CFPS, and the Singapore Medical Association, or SMA. The Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020 came into force on 1 July 2022 and the Medical Council's constitution now includes representative Council members from these three professional bodies besides the representative each from the three local medical schools. 12 members of the Council are elected members and 8 members are appointed by the Minister for Health.



There were also amendments in SMC's complaints and disciplinary processes. To allow quicker resolution of complaints, most complaints will be referred to an Inquiry Committee which will be the first committee to consider whether the complaint should be referred to the Complaints Committee to investigate or be dismissed. Chairman of the Complaints Committee will no longer be restricted to a member of the Council and any doctor member of the Complaints Panel can chair a Complaints Committee. Currently there are 271 medical practitioners in the Complaints Panel. The Disciplinary Tribunal functions were also separated from the complaints function. Any complaint from 1 July 2022 referred by SMC's Complaints Committees to the Disciplinary Tribunal will now be handled by the new Disciplinary Commission under the Ministry of Health.

Compulsory CME on Medical Ethics for all doctors

In the last edition of the SMC e-Newsletter which was circulated to you in November 2022, SMC highlighted the coming compulsory Continuing Medical Education (CME) on Medical Ethics for all doctors. This will start from the Practising Certificate or PC qualifying period from 2024 onwards and will become compulsory for PC renewal from 2026. The MOH Workgroup which reviews the Taking of Informed Consent and SMC Disciplinary Process had in its Report in November 2019, recommended the introduction of compulsory CME on Medical Ethics for doctors.

This includes, informed consent, the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines, SMC disciplinary processes and pertinent medico-legal cases. I quote, “There is 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. Mandating that doctors update themselves on these issues will ensure that they are exposed to baseline level of knowledge on the applicable legal standards in practice that will allow them to practise effectively.”

The Medical Ethics CME will be actively promoted by AMS, CFPS and SMA starting from this year. All doctors must obtain the minimum CME core points in these programmes as a prerequisite before they can renew their yearly or two-yearly PCs.

The MOH Workgroup further recommended incentivising and tracking the completion of such courses by making such modules compulsory and awarding core CME points upon their completion. A core medico-legal curriculum will be developed to complement and support this proposal.

SMC together with the three professional bodies have followed up on this recommendation. With regard to the core curriculum, the CME on Medical Ethics will be organised by our three professional bodies and will encompass four core areas i) Professionalism, ii) Ethics, iii) Informed Consent and Medical Decision-making, and iv) Medical Records, Privacy and Confidentiality.





The Medical Ethics CME will be actively promoted by AMS, CFPS and SMA starting from this year. All doctors must obtain the minimum CME core points in these programmes as a pre-requisite before they can renew their yearly or two-yearly PCs.

Series in Professional Ethics

With regard to SMC's updates and communications to doctors, I would urge all colleagues to keep abreast of the latest developments in the SMC website and SMC e-Newsletter as SMC constantly updates content in its website and publishes its Newsletter three times a year. The SMC e-Newsletter which is sent to your emails also highlights important matters, updates and news for your attention.

There is a series currently in the e-Newsletter on Professional Ethics focusing on common issues in the complaints to SMC. These include practice issues on "Propriety and Sexual Boundaries" and the "Prescriptions of hypnotics and benzodiazepines and codeine containing cough mixtures".



The Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines

Integrity, ethics and professionalism are the foundation of our practice. The Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines or ECEG consist of 58 pages of text widely spaced for easy reading. It is to our benefit to read the guidelines and I cannot fail to emphasise how immensely important it is to internalise the values in the ECEG.



Integrity, ethics and professionalism are the foundation of our practice.

It is not onerous to read and like all guidelines, you can consult the ECEG on the relevant sections during times when you face certain issues or if you wish to know about certain specific areas in your practice. For more details on each particular section, you can turn to the Handbook on Medical Ethics which gives a more detailed explanation on the particular code or guideline.



Conclusion

I would like to invite all of us to take a pause here and reflect on the career we have committed ourselves to. All these years invested into our education by our parents, teachers and others should not go to waste by indiscipline and unethical and unprofessional behaviour. If we take the time to read through the judgments of the Disciplinary Tribunals, it will help us pay heed to and learn to avoid their mistakes, poor practices and behaviour.



The practice of Medicine is both challenging and rewarding. Medical practitioners can meet these challenges when we are trained not only in the skills of medicine but also in the ethics and professionalism that accompany these skills. If you are so trained, you will find that your professional life will be truly rewarding. You can expect more details on continuing learning, training in these aspects, as well as CME from our three professional bodies.

I wish all of you success and a life of fulfilment, as you continue to practise ethically and professionally with compassion.

Thank you and have a good day.

Series in Professional Ethics

Recap on Propriety and Sexual Boundaries

In the 19th edition of the Singapore Medical Council's Newsletter, the first article under the Series of Professional Ethics titled "Propriety and Sexual Boundaries", was published to remind doctors of the need to pay heed to Guideline C4 of the 2016 Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines. In brief, Guideline C4 of the ECEG sets out advice on how to ensure that patient-doctor relationships are considered proper in the eyes of patients and the community.

As patient-doctor relationships are based on confidence and trust, it is critical for doctors to maintain propriety and observe appropriate boundaries in their relationships with patients.

In the previous article, wherein doctors were reminded that in performing physical examinations of patients, they should ensure that a reasonable patient would feel safe, secure and comfortable, without any misconception or fear that his/her modesty is compromised or that he/she is being taken advantage of in a sexual manner. In this regard, some ways that doctors can go about assuring patients are set out below:

- (a) Involve a chaperone in the examination where a patient requests for one, or if the doctor assesses that the presence of a chaperone is necessary to set the patient at ease, or for the doctor's own protection;
- (b) Explain his or her actions before and during the examination; and
- (c) Be alert and responsive to verbal and non-verbal cues of unease.

Apart from the above, doctors may also refer to the corresponding section C4 in the SMC Handbook on Medical Ethics, which sets out clear and actionable guidance on how to deal with intimate examinations.

The SMC trusts that the above would serve as a useful reminder to all doctors on how to approach intimate examinations in accordance with the principles in the ECEG and HME. For more guidance on the issues above, [please refer to Guideline C4 of the 2016 ECEG and Section C4 of the HME.](#)

Matters to Note

SMC Election 2023

The Singapore Medical Council will hold an election from Tuesday, 18 April 2023 to Tuesday, 2 May 2023 to fill seven (7) positions in the Medical Council.

Who Must Vote?

- All fully registered medical practitioners resident in Singapore; and
- Holding a valid Practising Certificate (PC)

When to Vote?

Tuesday, 18 April 2023 to Tuesday, 2 May 2023

How to Vote?

Log in to the Professional Registration System (PRS) using your Singpass at the SMC Website (<https://www.smc.gov.sg>) or scan the QR code below:



What if a Doctor Fails to Vote?

The doctor will not be entitled to apply for a PC unless he/she:

- Satisfies the Registrar that he/she had a good and sufficient reason for not voting at the election; or
- Pays to the SMC a penalty of \$500

How to Seek Assistance?

- Visit the SMC Election section under the *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)* page, on the SMC Website: (<https://www.healthprofessionals.gov.sg/smc/feedback>); or
- Email us at: SMC_election@spb.gov.sg



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