

## 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.





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### 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.



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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.