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President's Message



*D*ear colleagues,

Season's greetings to all.

We had shared key developments in medical regulation in the article "[Medical Registration \(Amendment\) Bill 2020](#)" in the [December 2020 SMC Newsletter](#). Following that, the Singapore Medical Council continued to work in concert with the Ministry of Health to prepare for the implementation of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020 (MRAA) which will come into force early next year.

In this issue, we look at some of the frameworks and processes that we are putting in place to resolve complaints effectively and expeditiously, and to deter frivolous and vexatious complaints. You can read about these from page 3 to 5.

As we approach the end of our second year battling the COVID-19 pandemic, we find that we are still learning new things about the COVID-19 virus. The policies and protocols which Singapore has developed to manage the virus and Delta variant since January 2020 have constantly evolved and revised to keep abreast of the rapid developments. While capacity has been ramped up substantially, our healthcare system has nevertheless been under great strain and pressure in recent months and our doctors and healthcare workers have worked very hard. However, with the multi-pronged approach of vaccination, home recovery programme, revised and simplified health protocols for positive cases and vaccination-differentiated safe management measures, all these will help to reduce the number of serious cases and to free up healthcare capacity to cater for critical healthcare needs.

I thank our colleagues for their perseverance and resilience to fight this prolonged battle, and to manage the challenges of the worst pandemic in our lifetime. Through such arduous times, your tenacity and unwavering dedication inspire us to continue and to look forward with hope towards normal times again.

Have a blessed year ahead and stay safe and well.

Professor Chee Yam Cheng
President

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020

*I*n a previous issue of SMC News, the SMC informed the medical profession that the Medical Registration (Amendment) Act 2020 (“MRAA”) had been passed by Parliament. The article also summarised some of the key changes to the SMC’s disciplinary processes that the MRAA will bring about when it comes into force.

Some of these changes include the formation of a new Inquiry Committee (“IC”), which will help the SMC sieve out unmeritorious complaints at the outset, and the appointment of a Disciplinary Commission (“DC”), which will take over the SMC’s role in appointing Disciplinary Tribunals (“DTs”).

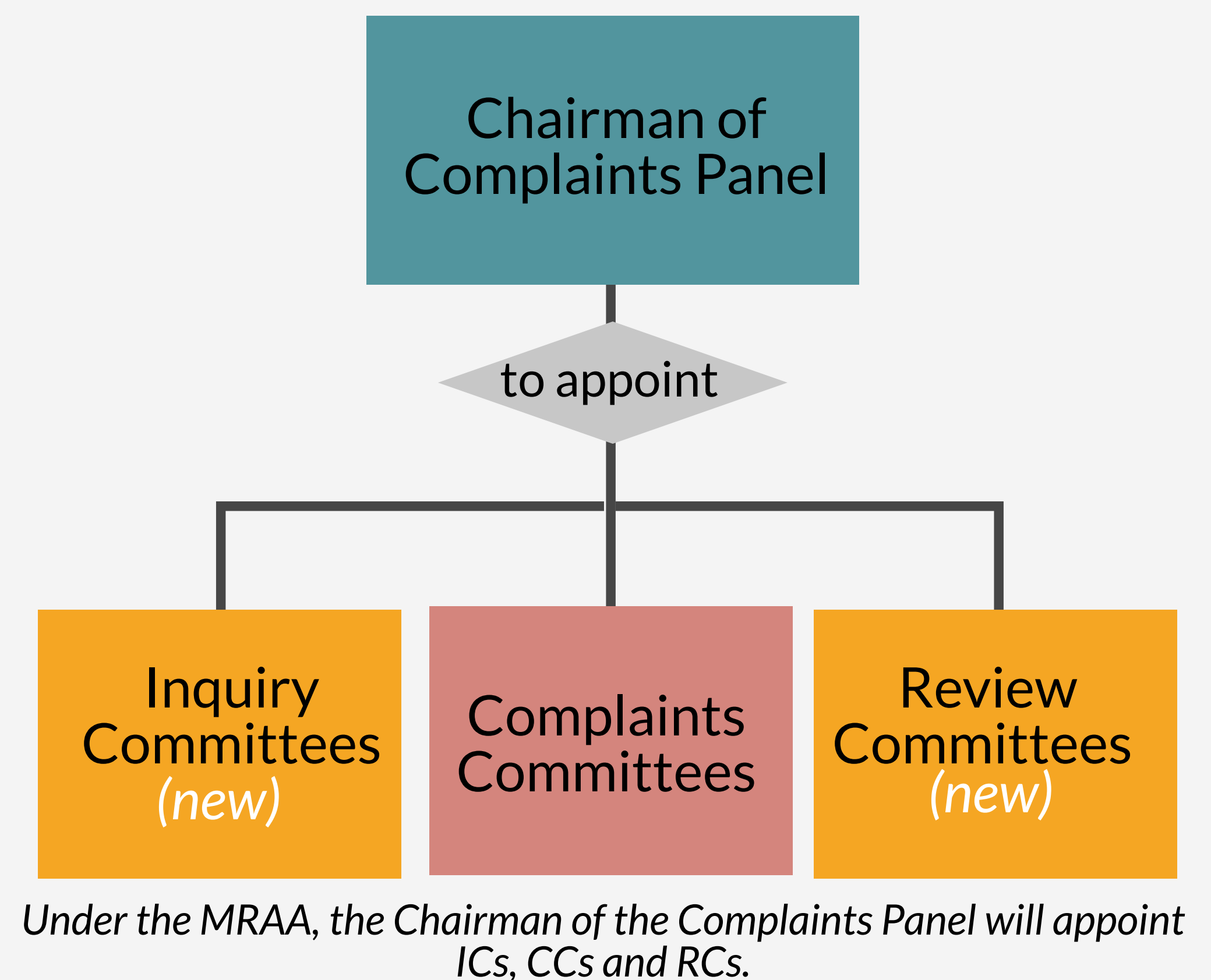
In the lead-up to the MRAA taking effect in 2022, SMC has been working closely with the Ministry of Health (“MOH”) and other stakeholders to put the necessary frameworks and processes in place. This article provides an overview of some key developments in this regard.



Effectively Resolving Complaints

In addition to the Inquiry Committee ("IC"), the MRAA also establishes a Review Committee ("RC"), which will assess appeals against decisions made by Complaints Committees ("CCs"). This supersedes the framework in the current Medical Registration Act ("MRA 2014"), where appeals against CC decisions are decided by the Minister for Health.

Under the MRAA, the Chairman of the Complaints Panel is responsible for appointing ICs, CCs and RCs. The chairmen and members of these committees will be drawn from the Complaints Panel, which will comprise a combination of SMC Council Members, medical practitioners of at least 8 years' standing, legal professionals, and lay persons.



In a marked departure from the MRA 2014, the caps on the number of registered medical practitioners, legal professionals and lay persons who can serve on the Complaints Panel will be removed. Previously, the Complaints Panel could only include a maximum of 100 registered medical practitioners with at least 10 years' experience and 50 lay persons nominated by the Minister for Health.

The SMC is confident that the larger Complaints Panel will enable ICs and CCs to process complaints more expeditiously. With the increase in Complaints Panel members, the SMC will be able to appoint more ICs and CCs and prevent delays which may be inadvertently caused by a small number of committees having to handle multiple complaints simultaneously.

The SMC recently completed an exercise for the appointment of Complaints Panel members, wherein requests for nominations were sent to the three healthcare clusters, the Academy of Medicine Singapore, the College of Family Physicians Singapore, the Singapore Medical Association, and other private healthcare providers. The SMC would like to extend its appreciation to these bodies for their nominations and to the nominees for agreeing to serve on the Complaints Panel. For future appointment exercises, the SMC encourages all doctors with at least 8 years' experience who have a passion for public service and wish to contribute to the self-regulation of the medical profession to indicate your interest to your respective healthcare cluster, institution, or professional body.

Deterring Frivolous and Vexatious Complaints

The SMC recognises that being informed of a complaint against oneself can be a difficult and stressful experience for a doctor.

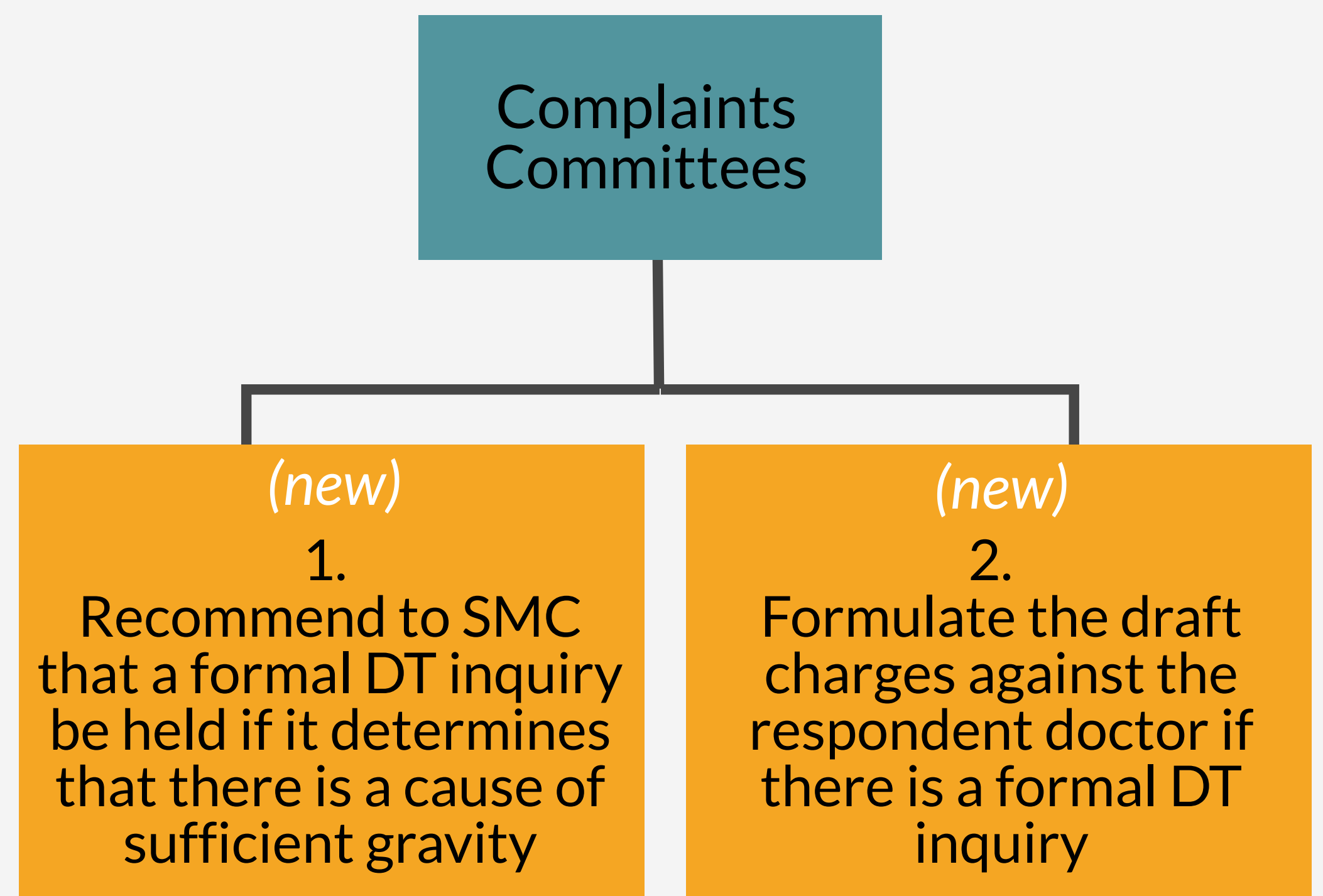
Doctors would thus be heartened that under the MRAA, ICs and CCs are empowered to order complainants whose allegations are frivolous, vexatious, misconceived or lacking in substance¹ to pay costs to the respondent doctor. This complements the ability of ICs and CCs to dismiss the complaint. Where the complainant's conduct was unreasonable (e.g. made in bad faith or as a personal vendetta), an IC or CC can order the complainant to compensate the respondent doctor for all costs that were reasonably incurred by him in responding to the complaint. The SMC is preparing internal guidelines to provide ICs and CCs with guidance on how they should exercise their discretion in this regard.

The SMC trusts that these amendments will deter frivolous complaints and protect doctors from the stress and anxiety that will undoubtedly arise from having to respond to the same.

[1] Some examples of conduct which can be categorised in these terms include repeat complaints, complaints which have already been resolved, allegations or proceedings which are brought in bad faith to annoy or embarrass or brought for a collateral purpose such as a personal vendetta.

Enhancing SMC's Internal Processes

When the MRAA comes into force, the SMC will have the prerogative to decide whether a complaint should be referred to the President of the DC for a formal DT inquiry. Where the CC determines that there is a cause of sufficient gravity for a formal inquiry after its investigation, its role will be to recommend to the SMC that a formal inquiry be held by a DT and to formulate the charges that should be preferred against the respondent doctor. In contrast, the MRA 2014 provides that where a CC has investigated a complaint, the CC alone has the discretion to decide whether a formal inquiry is appropriate and does not draft the charges for the inquiry.



The SMC is formulating its internal processes on referrals for a formal inquiry based on the guidance provided in recent disciplinary cases and is also preparing charge templates for the CCs to refer to when formulating their draft charges. To ensure consistency, the SMC will also seek the Council's guidance in determining whether a referral for a formal inquiry is in order.

With these new processes, the SMC is confident that only complaints which truly warrant disciplinary action will proceed for a DT inquiry. The new role of the CC in formulating the draft charges will also ensure that DTs focus on the misconduct identified by the CC, which will lead to more focused and efficient DT inquiries.

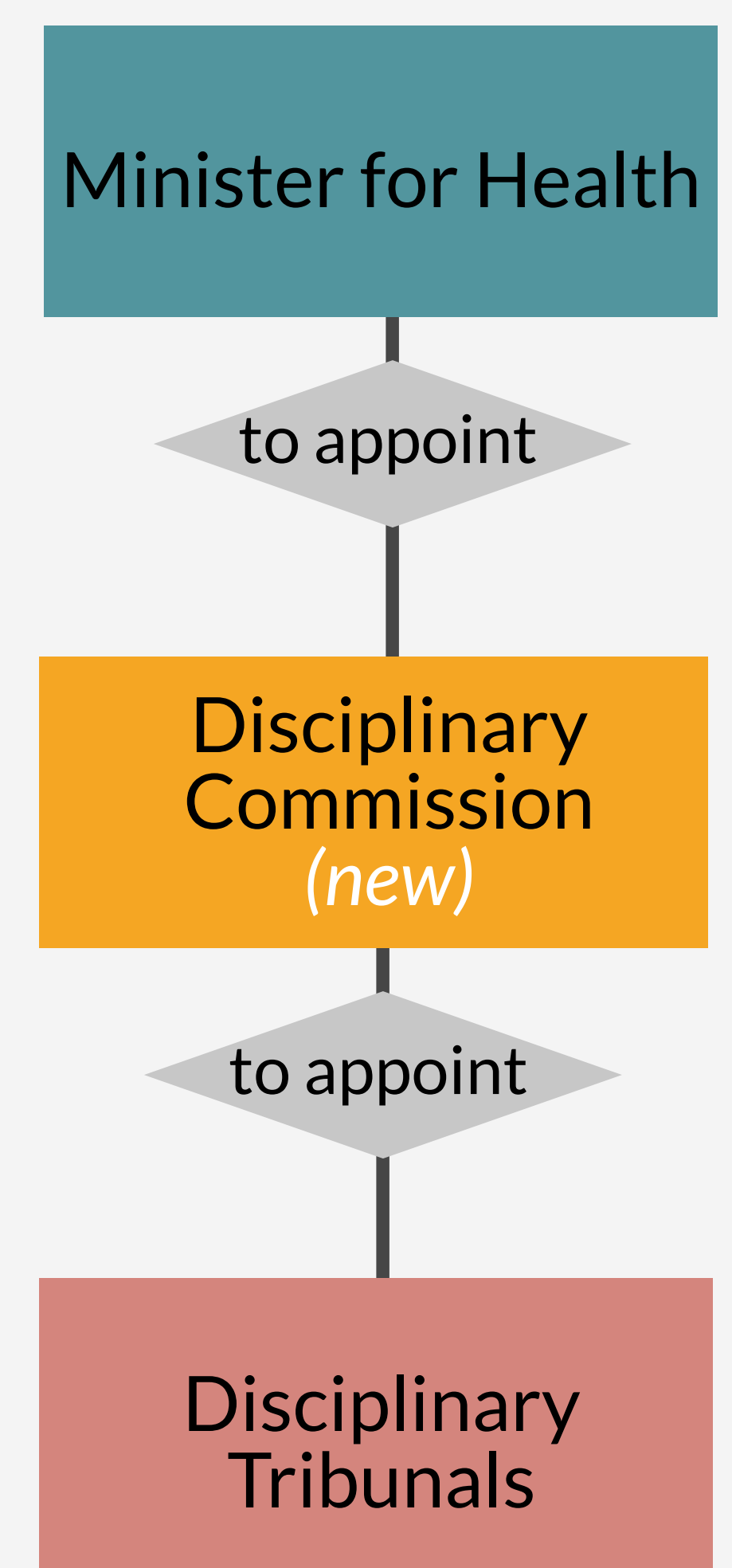
Formation of the Disciplinary Commission

As mentioned above, a new body known as the DC will be appointed by the Minister for Health and will take over the SMC's role in constituting DTs. This will address the perception that DTs lack independence as they are presently appointed by the SMC, which also acts as the prosecutor in such inquiries. The DC, which will be overseen by a senior doctor as President, will operate within the MOH and will be operationally separate from the SMC.

In the lead-up to the MRAA coming into force, the SMC is assisting MOH with the formation of the DC, drawing on SMC's experience in constituting DTs and serving as the DT Secretariat.

Further details about the DC will be announced by MOH in due course.

For more details on the MRAA, please refer to MOH's [press release](#) and pages 15 and 16 of [Dec 2020](#) of SMC News.



SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

Held on 25 September 2021

SMC held its Pledge Affirmation Ceremony virtually on 25 September 2021. The Pledge ceremony marks an important milestone in the career of a doctor who is at the threshold of obtaining full registration. The Pledge is a solemn oath which reminds doctors of their duties and responsibilities to patients and society.

SMC was honoured to have Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health as the Guest-of-Honour for the event. More than 450 provisionally- and conditionally-registered doctors took the Pledge which was witnessed by members of the Medical Council and invited guests from the medical professional bodies, medical schools and Chairman Medical Boards of hospitals. This Ceremony had the largest number of attendees since virtual Pledge ceremonies were started in 2020.

SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

Address by SMC President Professor Chee Yam Cheng



On behalf of the Singapore Medical Council, I would like to welcome our Guest-of-Honour, Minister for Health Mr Ong Ye Kung, our distinguished guests and our younger colleagues who are taking the Pledge today.

Many of you here started your housemanship or Post Graduate Year 1 (PGY1) training as it is now named, as the second cohort of house officers who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic marked a dramatic ending to your final medical school year whether in Singapore or overseas. The first time we had a major Coronavirus outbreak in Singapore was almost 20 years ago, in 2003, when SARS or the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome hit the world.

At that time, the causative agent was unknown. There was no diagnostic test and the disease was recognised by its clinical presentation and its severity. Many died from severe pneumonia and it rapidly spread regionally and from Hong Kong to Singapore. Because there were no tests, we estimated a total of 238 probable cases in Singapore between March and May 2003. Of these, 41% were healthcare workers. The overall fatality rate was 14%.

House officers in 2003 had a similar experience of a pandemic but much more terrifying. Doctors and nurses were among those who died. We were not prepared for this unexpected attack. There were not enough N95 masks in our hospitals, like what some countries experienced at the start of this COVID-19 pandemic. Our hospitals which were already at full capacity then were overwhelmed. Consider yourself a more fortunate group of house officers and doctors as our handling of COVID-19 benefited from the lessons learnt from SARS and other communicable disease outbreaks.



NUP medical team seeing migrant workers in the dormitory
Source: National University Polyclinic (NUP)



You are in the esteemed healthcare profession. You are in the frontline together with our health ambassadors, swabbers, vaccination team and others.

Address by SMC President Professor Chee Yam Cheng



Doctors affirm the Pledge at the Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony



...When you recite the pledge, the last two lines will read, we will “comply with the provisions of the Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines; and constantly strive to add to my knowledge and skill”.

You are in the esteemed healthcare profession. You are in the frontline together with our health ambassadors, swabbers, vaccination team and others. Our Ministers and the Director of Medical Services work with the expert committees, groups, businesses and organisations, providing the necessary leadership for the national preventive and disease management system. It is SG united at work towards a resilient nation against COVID. It has become very clear as we read of how countries fight this disease that we must stand united as a country to control COVID-19. We do not work alone; we are part of the team and ultimately a larger national and global system of care. Without those outside the healthcare system we will fail miserably. Even the best healthcare systems can be overwhelmed if the larger national system fails.

However, this experience no doubt will change healthcare practices around the world. The pandemic has taught us that as doctors, we spend more time treating and curing but now we need to practise national disease prevention as well. Our public health doctors have been featured prominently in the fight against COVID-19. Those who make an impactful difference include preventive medicine as part of their everyday practice.

You are here today to pledge that you will be an ethical and professional doctor. This is the bedrock of the medical profession. We cannot excel unless we are ethical and professional. The discoveries that changed the landscape of Medicine were made and borne out of ethical and professional research and practice. You are in a profession, but what is a profession? Let me quote the definition from The Australian Council of Professions, 2003. “A Profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others.”

“It is inherent in the definition of a Profession that a code of ethics governs the activities of each Profession. Such codes require behaviour and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual. They define and demand high standards of behaviour in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues. Often these codes are enforced by the Profession and are acknowledged and accepted by the community.”

Address by SMC President Professor Chee Yam Cheng



*NUP staff puts on the personal protective equipment
Source: NUP*

You are all here because as members of the Medical Profession, you are governed by the SMC Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines or its acronym ECEG. When you recite the Pledge, the last two lines will read, we will “comply with the provisions of the Ethical Code; and constantly strive to add to my knowledge and skill”.

The SMC is the disciplinary body for doctors guilty of professional misconduct and errant behaviour. It upholds the high standards for ethics and moral behaviour of doctors to safeguard the profession from disrepute, and maintain the public’s trust and confidence in the medical profession.

The SMC collaborates with the Academy of Medicine Singapore, the College of Family Physicians Singapore and the Singapore Medical Association, whose leaders are here with us today, to maintain ethics and professionalism in medical practice. They run courses on ethics and professionalism, knowing that this is a lifelong professional development that no doctor should neglect.

Be in the company of good role models who are like-minded to improve your practice. Learn from them, be involved in your profession, be members of the professional bodies and keep in touch with their academic and professional activities. Read their journals and newsletters and be acquainted with the medical environment in Singapore, the region and in the world. Remember that prevention is better than cure.

Next year, the amendments to the Medical Registration Act with revisions to the ECEG will be operative. With the help from our professional medical bodies, we hope to see the continued decline in the number of complaints per 1,000 doctors. It was 18 in 2016 and 7.6 last year.

There is no self-regulation when doctors do not step forward to serve. I am heartened that SMC has good and highly committed volunteers and we hope to see more of them. Some of you may be called into this important commitment and when that day comes, we hope that you will remember this call and take it upon yourself to do this duty, like the generations of good doctors before you who have set an excellent example as your role models.

On this note, I truly wish you the best for your future career and practice and that you will stay ethical, professional besides being safe and healthy to take care of yourself, your family and your patients.

Thank you.

SINGAPORE MEDICAL COUNCIL

Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony

Speech by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health



*I*t gives me great pleasure to be here with you for the Singapore Medical Council Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony. Congratulations to all the newly registered doctors, and my heartfelt thanks to all of you for being at the frontline battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

In our highly globalised world, no country can be an impenetrable fortress. Even if the borders were closed to travellers - ideas, information and diseases can easily transcend borders. Our doctors work in these challenging times when novel communicable diseases can emerge regularly, with rapid spread and an evolving, unique disease pattern.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first broke out early last year, the medical and scientific community around the world responded quickly. The virus' genome was mapped, the PCR test was developed, and a vaccine invented and approved in record time, leveraging technological progress that was decades in the making. There is perhaps no time in the history of medicine where so much research and medical advancement was done over such a short period of time.

This is only made possible with the resilience and dedication of the medical community. As we prepare for our transition to COVID resilience, Singaporeans take comfort that we have ready expertise in our national healthcare system and the capabilities to respond quickly to treat the sick, and to attenuate the spread of infection.

Today's pledge-taking is your commitment to the lifelong journey of saving and improving lives. And this is possible only if you build trust with your patients - the cornerstone of every doctor-patient relationship. The relationship of trust was put to the test as we rolled out our COVID-19 national vaccination programme. As it turned out, our people heeded the advice of the Government and the medical profession, leading to Singapore having one of the highest vaccination rates in the world.

But relationships are changing because of technology. Every one of us are staying in touch with many more acquaintances through messaging services. Family members can sit at the same dinner table but each engrossed in their own devices. Customers have infinite amount of information at their fingertips and will compare and plough through recommendations before buying a book or a toaster.

And if you are in a position of authority, be it a public servant or a doctor, the person you serve will question or even challenge your solutions or treatment. It is a good thing when patients become more knowledgeable, and more involved in co-creating treatments and solutions. But at the same time, information technology also helped proliferate misinformation, and the drip effect of daily doubts that come through our devices will erode trust over time.



A doctor from the CGH team performs a swab on a nursing home staff
Source: Changi General Hospital (CGH)

Speech by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health



CGH doctor attends to a patient
Source: CGH

Today's pledge-taking is your commitment to the lifelong journey of saving and improving lives. And this is possible only if you build trust with your patients – the cornerstone of every doctor-patient relationship.

The medical profession must continue to work harder to preserve and strengthen the trust between doctors and patients, by demonstrating morality and integrity, guaranteeing professional competency, and showing commitment to selfless service.

The foundation of healthcare is ethical and professional practice. As doctors, you must continue to uphold your personal ethos and maintain high personal practices of care. You must also continually put in effort to assure good standards by building your skills and competencies. Involve yourself in research and education and keep on learning.

Misconduct in any profession is inevitable. But when it happens, the profession will take firm and fair actions to uphold its reputation and restore trust. This is the unenviable task of the SMC's Complaints Committees or Disciplinary Tribunals (DT). Doctors also need to be able to trust that the disciplinary system is a fair and transparent one, which produces consistent outcomes, and which sets and applies clear standards.

Amendments to the Medical Registration Bill 2020

This system of professional self-regulation will be strengthened through amendments to the Medical Registration Act, which will come into force in early 2022. Through the amendments, which includes establishing an inquiry committee to sieve frivolous or vexatious complaints, measures to increase the pool of persons available to sit on various disciplinary committees, and establishing a Disciplinary Commission to professionalise and preserve the independence of the DTs. These changes will make the disciplinary system more expeditious, consistent, proportionate, fair and independent.

Along with the amendments to the MRA, the SMC is also working on updating the SMC's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines, or ECEG, and its accompanying handbook. Doctors are strongly encouraged to read the ECEG and the handbook. The latest revisions to the ECEG will reflect the changes in medical practice, for example, the increased use of telemedicine, that have emerged since the last revision in 2016. The revision to the ECEG will help to bring more certainty and clarity to the ethical practice of medicine.

Speech by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Health

Closing

Society has a high regard for doctors. Some of the most obstinate people I know only listen to their doctors. Parents dreamt of their children becoming doctors. MOH wishes you an exciting career in medicine, rising up to the call of medicine, putting your patients before self, and in everything, doing no harm. Society has invested in you, and we hope you will give back to the community and serve to the best of your abilities.

We live in challenging times. It has been more than 20 months since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a long-drawn fight and Singaporeans are “battle-weary”, including our healthcare professionals. But I know your morale is kept high. Doctors are the bedrock of an effective healthcare system. As doctors, it is important to take care of your own well-being, both physically and mentally, so that you can continue to care for your patients. I encourage you to look out for and support one another to ride through this trying period.

Congratulations on reaching this milestone in your medical career. Remember the words of the oath you are about to take.

Thank you.



NUP doctor seeing a patient in the polyclinic
Source: NUP

Society has a high regard for doctors... we hope you will give back to the community and serve to the best of your abilities.

SMC Annual Report 2020 Dashboard

Our statistics

This dashboard illustrates the key figures of the SMC's Annual Report 2020.

Medical Registration



15,430

Medical Practitioners

▲554

from 14,876 in 2019

2,175

Family Physicians

6,088

Specialists

Practising Certificate Renewal and Continuing Medical Education



73,977

Accreditation Applications
and Credit Claims



5,288

Practising Certificate Renewals

Our Supervisory Framework



more than

3,000

trained supervisors

Train-the-Trainer workshops helped train more than 3,000 supervisors.

Our Disciplinary Processes



281

 complaints

Reviewed by the
Complaints Committee

Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony



5

 online sessions

The Pledge Ceremony was held online over five sessions in June, July and September 2020

930

 doctors

took the Physician's Pledge alongside their peers witnessed by Council members and invited guests

RE M I N D E R

Practising Certificate Renewal

Applications submitted on and after 1 December 2021 will be considered as late applications. A late application fee of \$80 will apply.

1.

For Who?

Fully and conditionally registered doctors whose **Practising Certificates (PCs)** are **expiring on 31 December 2021**, can submit their application from 2 September 2021.

2.

PC Renewal Criteria

- Obtained **sufficient Continuing Medical Education (CME) points** within the qualifying period
- **Must not have any outstanding fine** for not voting in previous SMC's Elections (applies to doctors on full registration only)

3.

How to renew?

Doctors need to log into the **Professional Registration System (PRS)** on the SMC website with their Singpass at least one month before their PC expires to apply for a renewal.

Applications submitted on and after **1 December 2021** will be considered as late applications. A late application fee of \$80 will apply.

4.

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.

SMC NEWSLETTER



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