

"A Career of Continuous Learning"

Editor's Note:

245 fully and conditionally registered doctors attended the Singapore Medical Council Physician's Pledge Affirmation Ceremony, held on 2 May 2002, at the College of Medicine Building's Auditorium. Of these newly registered doctors, 180 are Singaporeans and 65 are foreigners. We reproduce here the speech by Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services.

Firstly, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to the newly registered medical officers. We look forward to working with you as colleagues in the medical profession, delivering care to our patients to the best of our ability and upholding the noble traditions of medicine in Singapore. To those newly registered doctors who have joined us from overseas, I would like to extend a warm welcome and my best wishes.

You are starting medical practice, or building up careers in medicine, at an exciting time filled with both unprecedented opportunities as well as great challenges. All of us are familiar with the promise that medical research and biotechnology hold for medicine – fundamental understanding of diseases, more accurate and rapid diagnostic tools, more effective treatments, more curative therapies. At the same time, the rapid advances in medical knowledge and practice are creating formidable challenges to doctors and to the medical profession as a whole.

As individual practitioners, a key problem is how to keep up with the explosive rate of knowledge accrual. This problem is compounded by the fact that the average patient today has such easy access to medical information through the Internet, some accurate and relevant, others totally wrong, but all of which influence the patient's perceptions of their medical problems and their management.

Within institutional care settings, a major challenge is how to get our healthcare teams to work effectively together, to prevent fragmentation of care delivery and to minimise the uncoordinated management of each

individual patient as a collection of body part problems. As a healthcare system, how do we ensure that rapidly evolving "best clinical practices" or "evidence-based guidelines" are incorporated into the care delivered by doctors across the whole spectrum of healthcare settings so as to minimise inappropriate variation in care standards across practitioners and institutions.

As a profession, we need to assume leadership roles in engaging these weighty issues proactively and diligently. However, for the purposes of my brief address today, I would just like to focus on one central plank of our response to these challenges – that is medical education.

BASIC MEDICAL EDUCATION

In recent years, medical education has undergone a series of fairly profound changes as a result of the pace and nature of advances in medical knowledge and practice.

Today, basic medical education in medical school no longer attempts to provide graduates with knowledge and skills that would last them through their subsequent career. Instead, the basic medical curriculum seeks to establish a sound foundation in the basic medical sciences, skills in clinical medicine and communications, and very importantly, the honing of the faculties of critical thinking and analysis, and the skills and habit of life long learning. The NUS medical faculty carried out a wide-ranging revamp of its medical curriculum along these lines in 1997 and the Singapore Medical Council has started to strengthen the training component of housemanship in the year 2001.

Beyond medical school and housemanship, each medical practitioner needs to keep himself current with changes in medicine generally and in areas relevant to his own practice, in particular. Our patients and society at large also want to be assured that the doctors they consult are practising up-

to-date medicine and offering them care of a good quality.

For these reasons, the SMC will be making Continuing Medical Education (CME) compulsory for all doctors in Singapore from January 2003. Doctors will be required to obtain a minimum of 50 CME points within a 2-year qualifying period prior to the year in which their practising certificates are due for renewal. For example, doctors whose practising certificates are to be renewed in 2005 would have to obtain a minimum of 50 CME points for the 2-year period from 2003 to 2004 as a condition for renewal. Half of these points should be in core areas, which for specialists would be from CME activities in their specific specialty, and for non-specialists, would be broad topics identified by the College of Family Physicians as being vital for all GPs.

The linking of certificate renewal to CME is a practice that is already required of doctors in many countries all over the world, including most states in the USA, some states in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and some countries in the EU. The UK will be incorporating CME into its framework for the revalidation of doctors.

The SMC has worked very hard to make the fulfillment of this CME requirement as convenient for busy practitioners as possible. The SMC had launched its Online CME System in 2000 to allow all registered doctors to review the calendar of accredited CME activities in Singapore. They can also log in their CME activities and track their cumulative points to date. All of you will be able to gain access to this system now that you have been awarded full or conditional registration. Over the past 2 years from 2000-2002, the SMC has also enhanced the Online CME system in response to feedback from doctors and the professional agencies.

The SMC has also worked closely with the College of Family Physicians, the Academy of Medicine and the Singapore Medical Association to ensure that there are enough CME activities available for

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GPs and specialists, and that they are genuinely useful to the doctors concerned. The SMC has also made it possible for doctors to gain CME points from a wide variety of activities apart from attending talks. These include reading journals, participating in distance-learning CME, attending workshops, seminars and lectures as well as

conducting research. I am sure you will be glad to hear that participating in grand ward rounds and Clinical-Pathological Conferences (CPCs) also count for CME points.

CONCLUSION

One of the hallmarks of professionals is the desire to continually upgrade themselves in order to stay at the cutting

edge of their practice. As you embark upon your careers as full-fledged medical professionals, I urge you to bear in mind that all knowledge has a shelf-life and that we must continually update ourselves in order to provide our patients with the standards of care we have sworn to uphold.

Once again, congratulations to all of you and best wishes for the future. ■