

President's

WELCOME ADDRESS



Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

Good evening, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, distinguished guests Mr Chan Yeng Kit, Dr Beh Swan Gin, Prof Kenneth Mak, Dr Ho Kaiwei, Prof Chee Yam Cheng, Dr Tan Wu Meng, Dr Lim Wee Kiak and Mr Anthony Tan, delegates from the Medical Associations of South East Asian Nations (MASEAN), honoured guests from the professional and trade associations, fellow colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Once upon a time, there was a houseman who thought that the SMA platinum credit card was good and attractive, so he signed up to be a Member of the SMA. He did not have any idea what the SMA did, but he faithfully renewed his Membership every year, out of a sense that he should belong to an association of doctors. Then he was caught up with specialist training and the acquisition of letters which he could attach behind his name. Meanwhile, his SMA Membership subscription continued to be automatically renewed through his credit card every year.

When he finally reached the hallowed grounds of private practice, he decided on a whim to attend the SMA Annual

General Meeting to find out what his hard-earned money was being used for. To his relief, he discovered that the money did go to good use. A year or two later, an eminent cardiologist decided to step down from the SMA Council; this doctor was then invited to take up his place on the Council and he foolishly decided to do so.

Well, this doctor is none other than myself and this year marks my ninth year on the Council. I am deeply honoured to have the privilege of addressing all of you here tonight.

To start with, let me thank all of you for coming to the SMA Annual Dinner.

The Annual Dinner marks the high point of the SMA's calendar year, and it is a time when we honour those who have contributed greatly to the medical profession, and also a time for the medical fraternity to come together. It was a relief to be able to resume our annual dinner last year, after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tonight, I am especially appreciative of our MASEAN delegates who have come all the way from their respective countries to attend the mid-term MASEAN meeting, which was held earlier today.

In the next few minutes, allow me to highlight some of the work that the SMA has been doing for the medical profession.

We are the only professional body that includes medical students and junior doctors in our Membership. According to a study published in the *Singapore Medical Journal* in 2022, 21% of medical students in Singapore come from households with monthly incomes of less than \$3,000. Through the SMA Charity Fund, we have provided more than 450 bursaries to medical students from low-income families to assist with their basic living expenses. These students are then able to concentrate on their medical studies without having to worry about making ends meet.

Through the SMA Doctors-in-Training Committee, we engage the relevant institutions and the Ministry of Health (MOH) regarding various residency concerns, such as long working hours, work stress, protected time for studying and career prospects. Some of our initiatives include a Telegram chatbot helpline to support junior doctors, a digital handbook for house officers, as well as a “Called to See Patient” workshop.

Through our engagements with MOH, we provide feedback on issues and policies affecting doctors in private practice – most recently on the Healthier SG initiative for GPs and the implementation of insurance panels for private practice specialists. We have shared GPs’ concerns about the price caps for whitelisted drugs under the Healthier SG scheme, and we have also repeatedly advocated that insurance panels should be open to all specialists, as long as they charge reasonably.

Looking ahead, we have concerns about the proposed Health Information Bill that will require mandatory contribution of patients’ health information to the National Electronic Health Record (NEHR) by all licensed healthcare providers. While we acknowledge the benefits of the NEHR, we believe that implementing a solution that upholds patient autonomy and privacy is absolutely essential, and cybersecurity and cost implications should be factored in as well.

Finally, you are likely aware that the Singapore Medical Council will require all doctors to obtain continuing medical education core points for medical ethics, starting from next year. Through the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism, we are working hard to come up with learning modules so that all doctors can meet this requirement without hassle.

In conclusion, although doctors face increasing regulatory as well as commercial pressures, I believe most of us still consider ourselves fortunate to be in our profession. We can pay it forward by advocating for the profession and advocating for our patients, and by uplifting others less fortunate than ourselves. This is also in line with the SMA slogan: For Doctors, For Patients.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr Ivan Low as well as the SMA Secretariat for organising the SMA Annual Dinner. With that, I hope you enjoy your dinner and have a very good evening. ♦



The 64th SMA Council with Guest of Honour Dr Vivian Balakrishnan and distinguished guests