

Mental Capacity in Focus: Annual National Medico-Legal Seminar 2023

Text by Sylvia Thay, Deputy Manager



Day 1 morning panellists addressing questions from the ground

Doctors, lawyers, nurses and hospital administrators were among the many gathered early in the morning of 28 October for the return of the much-anticipated Annual National Medico-Legal Seminar (ANMLS) 2023, jointly organised by the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism (CMEP) and the Medico-Legal Society of Singapore (MLSS). Held at Four Points by Sheraton Singapore, the two-day event focused on “Reflecting on Mental Capacity Act (MCA) after 15 years” for the first day and “Medico-legal investigation of sexual assault” on the second day and was attended by 90 and 50 participants respectively.

President of MLSS A/Prof Lai Siang Hui kicked off the seminar with a short opening address before handing the stage over to District Judge (DJ) Dr Colin Tan who commented on emerging issues in mental capacity both in Singapore and overseas. In his speech, DJ Dr Tan touched on the prevalence of dementia even in ancient times and discussed key concerns such as the link between mental capacity issues and the ageing population worldwide.

The day progressed with experts from various fields speaking on different aspects of the MCA, including its principles and applications, assessment of capacity in people with dementia and with intellectual disability, as well as a segment where the Public Guardian Ms Regina Chang spoke on her role in the mental capacity ecosystem.

Day 2 of the seminar saw participants return to discuss and learn more specifically about the topic of sexual assault. SMA President Dr Ng Chee Kwan welcomed the speakers and participants, and the half-day programme began with a line-up of speakers providing insights into the overall investigation process. These speakers presented their perspectives of the investigation stages, from the examining clinician to the investigative work and finally the legal defence. Through these sessions, participants gained better understanding about the appropriate approach with victims, the widespread availability of drugs, as well as the significance of doctors testifying in person during court hearings.

Over the two days, there were also plenty of opportunities for participants to raise questions (anonymously through the platform Slido, or in person) in line with the topics discussed. The moderators and panellists would then select and address them during the designated question and answer sessions. Such sessions proved to be helpful for everyone in attendance, as the panellists offered their input and insights on the questions discussed, and participants were also able to chip in with follow-up questions from the ground.

In closing, A/Prof Anantham Devanand, Executive Director of SMA CMEP, reminded participants of the new mandatory medical ethics continuing medical education points requirements and invited all to look forward to next year’s ANMLS scheduled for 19 to 20 October 2024.

We would also like to express our thanks to all speakers and participants, as well as our sponsor, Medical Protection Society, for this year’s successful run of the Annual National Medico-Legal Seminar! ♦



Day 2 speakers pose for a group photo with SMA President Dr Ng Chee Kwan (fourth from left)