

# A CALL FOR JUNIOR DOCTORS to Participate in SMA

Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Health (MOH), there were 5,987 public non-specialist doctors in Singapore's healthcare workforce in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Based on MOH Holdings (MOHH) statistics shared with us in 2023, there are approximately 4,000 junior doctors under MOHH's employment.<sup>2</sup>

Residents and junior doctors thus make up a significant proportion of the 18,000 or so actively practising doctors in Singapore. SMA strives to represent these doctors through our SMA Doctors-in-Training (DIT) Committee.

Some of our previous efforts include:

- Lobbying for overnight call allowance for house officers (HOs). This is a historical achievement; my cohort was the last cohort of HOs who were not paid for performing overnight calls.
- Conducting a survey on residents' perceptions of overnight duty systems in Singapore: night float versus full overnight call (published in the October 2020 issue of *SMJ*).<sup>3</sup>
- Highlighting residents' concerns that reservist training may affect the training requirements from sponsoring institutions, through letters to the Ministry of Defence and the sponsoring institutions.
- Providing recommendations to the Singapore Medical Council on optimising the application process for full registration after gathering feedback from conditionally registered doctors.<sup>4</sup>
- Representing junior doctors in multiple lines of effort within the MOH National Wellness Committee for Junior Doctors from 2021 to 2023.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the areas that the SMA DIT Committee is currently working on include:

- Advocacy and support for doctors with psychiatric conditions, so that they can work in a supportive environment and be able to achieve independence in practice.
- Educational workshops and mobile resources for HOs and medical officers, to orientate them as to their roles and responsibilities, and to equip them to handle real-life situations, such as how to handle patients while on call and in the emergency departments.
- Outreach and engagement platforms and events to provide direct support to doctors facing issues at work, and to reduce information asymmetry on matters concerning junior doctors.

SMA Membership is readily accessible to HOs, as their SMA Membership subscriptions are currently sponsored by MOHH. To facilitate the continuation of Membership after housemanship, SMA offers reduced Membership rates for the first seven years after graduation. Furthermore, junior doctors can use their personal training fund to fully pay for Membership fees, which are also tax deductible. For Members whose spouse is also a doctor, complimentary Spouse Membership is available upon application.

I would like to encourage junior doctors and residents to stay on as Members even after graduation. Membership not only gives SMA the mandate to represent and advocate for you, but also allows you to enjoy the full benefits of Membership, including complimentary access to our mandatory medical ethics continuing medical education programmes.

We are always on the lookout for doctors who wish to contribute towards improving the work environment for junior doctors and residents. If you would like to join us or send us feedback, do email the SMA DIT Committee at [dit@sma.org.sg](mailto:dit@sma.org.sg) or contact me at [nck@sma.org.sg](mailto:nck@sma.org.sg).

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr Ivan Low, Chairman of the SMA DIT Committee for his assistance in preparing this column. ♦

## References

1. Ministry of Health Singapore. *Healthcare Workforce Statistics*. In: HealthHub. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ONz18A>. Accessed 10 December 2024.
2. Low I. *Focusing Efforts for Junior Doctors: Meeting with MOHH*. *SMA News* 2024; 56(2):22-3.
3. Loo BKG, Ng CL, Chin RT, et al. *Nationwide survey comparing residents' perceptions of overnight duty systems in Singapore: night float versus full overnight call*. *Singapore Med J* 2020; 61(10):559-62.
4. *SMA Query on Application Process – From Conditional to Full Registration*. *SMA News* 2024; 56(11):10-1.
5. Goh YX, Tjio C, Tan T, Low I. *Our Path of Advocacy: Junior Doctor Wellness*. *SMA News* 2023; 55(7):18-20.

Dr Ng is a urologist in private practice and current President of the SMA. He has two teenage sons whom he hopes will grow much taller than him. He has probably collected too many watches for his own good.

