

# PRESIDENT'S *Welcome Address*



Text by Dr Ng Chee Kwan

Good evening, Permanent Secretary (Policy and Development), Ministry of Health, Ms Lai Wei Lin; Dr Syed Harun Alhabsyi, Member of Parliament for Nee Soon GRC; President of the Malaysian Medical Association Dato Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira; President of the Medical Association of Thailand Prof Prakitpunthu Tomtitchong, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome to all of you.

I am deeply honoured to be elected as president of SMA for the third year, and I look forward to serving all of you. At the same time, since I have now reached the age at which I get a CPF retirement account, I also look forward to handing over the SMA President duties to my successor next year.

One of the perks of my role as SMA President is that I get to work with some of the brightest, most dedicated people in healthcare – and I am referring to my fellow SMA Council members. Much of what the SMA has achieved in the past year is due to the collective wisdom of the Council and before I start the speech proper, I would like to thank all our Council members for giving their precious time in service to the medical profession.

Tonight, I would like to give a brief recap of some of SMA's significant activities over the past year.

First of all, we launched the mandatory medical ethics (MME) continuing medical education (CME) programme for our Members last year. Through the efforts of the SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism and the SMA Secretariat, we put up on-demand distance learning programmes and organised webinars for doctors to fulfil their MME requirements. Our MME CME programmes are complimentary for Members, including spouse members. I am glad that our MME CME programmes have been very well received; thus far, we have submitted more than 22,000 MME points for doctors. We have also seen an increase in the number of doctors taking up SMA Membership, so that they can access our complimentary MME CME programmes. Moving forward, we will not rest on our laurels, and will endeavour to maintain our position as a leading MME CME provider for the benefit of all doctors.

We continued our engagement with insurance companies and the Ministry of Health (MOH) to advocate for fair dealing

for doctors and patients. We maintained our stance that all specialists should be able to join health insurance panels without restriction. We believe that it is important for patients to not only have a healthy number of panel specialists to choose from, but also the assurance that their chosen doctor will remain on the panel for their continuity of care. To this end, we advocated for publication of the number of insurance panel specialists, as well as the number of new specialists introduced and removed from panels each year, so that patients can make an informed decision when choosing an insurer. I am glad that MOH has obtained these statistics and put them up on their website. We also pointed out that with doctors' fees kept under control through fee benchmarks and insurance contracts, other factors that contribute to rising healthcare costs, such as cost of drugs and hospital facility fees, should be looked into.

The SMA has a long history of representing junior doctors. Historically, the SMA lobbied for overnight call allowance for house officers. This is now considered a given, but many years ago, house officers were not paid for doing overnight calls – I belong to the



last cohort that was not paid. More recently, the SMA Doctors-in-Training (DIT) Committee continues the legacy of representing residents and junior doctors. In 2024, the committee gave feedback to the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) with a view to improving the process of obtaining full registration for conditionally registered junior doctors. In addition, the committee runs educational workshops for house officers and medical officers to educate them on their roles and responsibilities, and to equip them to handle on call and emergency issues. The DIT Committee is currently working on advocacy and support for doctors with mental health issues, so that they can work in a supportive environment and be able to achieve independence in practice. We are grateful to all stakeholders including the SMC, MOH Holdings and the sponsoring institutions for taking the DIT Committee's feedback seriously and for supporting our initiatives for junior doctors.

In the past year, the SMA continued to provide value-added services to our Members through our courses and seminars, Members' social events such as the SMA Members' Appreciation Night, and sports activities such as the SMA

Annual Golf Tournament. We continued to serve all doctors through our partnership with professional indemnity partners Medical Protection Society, Marsh and Income Insurance.

We also successfully made the move to new office premises at 166 Bukit Merah Central in July 2024, without significant disruption of our services. This is a rented premise, and we are looking at making better use of our investment funds by purchasing an office space as a backup for our own use.

Moving forward, an area of concern for the SMA would be the impending introduction of the Health Information Bill (HIB). Once implemented, it will be compulsory for all private clinics to contribute patients' health information to the National Electronic Health Record. Potential issues may arise from clinics who are still using pen and paper as they switch to electronic medical records, and for all clinics to comply with cybersecurity requirements. We look forward to further dialogue with MOH and cybersecurity service providers so that we can better support our Members in ensuring they comply with the new HIB, while managing the cost impact.

The motto of the SMA is "Jasa Utama" which means "Service before Self". As

an Association, we strive to serve the medical profession to the best of our ability, for the good of the public and for the good of our patients. I am glad to report that over the past year, our membership has increased to 11,000 Members, and we now represent about 47% of all SMC-registered doctors. Tonight, I wish to thank all our Members for their unwavering support for the SMA. Rest assured that I and my fellow Council members will continue to advocate for you in the issues that matter to you.

I would like to thank each and every one of you who are here tonight, for supporting our SMA Annual Dinner through your presence, and through your contributions. Finally, a big thank you to Adj Asst Prof Lambert Low and the SMA Secretariat for organising tonight's dinner.

Thank you for your attention and please enjoy the rest of the evening. ♦

#### Legend

1. 66th SMA Council members pose for a group photo with Guest of Honour Ms Lai Wei Lin and distinguished guests



1