

The Editors' Musings

DR TINA TAN

Editor

Dr Tan is a psychiatrist in private practice and an alumnus of Duke-NUS Medical School. She treats mental health conditions in all age groups but has a special interest in caring for the elderly. With a love for the written word, she makes time for reading, writing and self-publishing on top of caring for her patients and loved ones.



Did you know that the very first issue of *SMA News* was published 60 years ago in 1966? This means the newsletter can be considered to be celebrating its "Diamond Jubilee" this year.

To commemorate the occasion, our August and September issues will feature a unique spectrum of articles that showcase both the history of our publication and how it has evolved with time. Why two issues? Well, we simply could not pack everything into one.

In sifting through the treasure trove that is 60 years of past articles, our team has dug up quite a few hidden gems. Past issues featured a different range of things compared to what we have these days. From marriage and promotion announcements to a range of historically hot-button issues such as glue-sniffing, heroin addiction and the problem of brain drain (in the context of medical education); from drugs ads for Flagyl and Lexotan (yes, as in, the benzodiazepine) to a lively exchange between *SMA* and the then Minister for Health on the Abortion Bill (among other things).

All of these issues are publicly available in our online archives, which means that you, the

reader, can trawl through snippets of history of our local medical landscape and read about the goings-on of some of the more well-known names in our community from back in the day. Alas, there are gaps in issues from those very early times, so if anyone happens to find a missing piece to add to our collection in your home (or that of your parents' or grandparents'), do send it along to us.

To save the reader the trouble of having to go through the online archives, we have reprinted a mere handful of these articles to whet the appetites of the more intrepid treasure hunters. Notably, in this issue's selection, we have reprinted an article each by two of our past anonymous writers, Garfield and Hobbit. Not to worry, more will be featured in our September issue.

Despite this being our Diamond Jubilee, I would like to think that we are still diamonds in the making. Though the newsletter has changed in its appearance, and the people helming it are certainly not the same as the originals, one thing is certain – our goal remains the same: for doctors, for patients.

DR TOH HAN CHONG

Guest Editor

Dr Toh is a senior consultant medical oncologist and Deputy CEO (Strategic Partnerships) at the National Cancer Centre Singapore. He was a former Editor of *SMA News*. In his free time, Dr Toh enjoys eating durians and ice cream, reading, writing, rowing and watching films. Thankfully, the latter four are not fattening.



SMA News was born as a humble two-pager in August 1966, a year after Singapore's independence. Its first Editor was Prof Arthur Lim, a trailblazing giant of ophthalmology who truly elevated Singapore's ophthalmology to a world-beating global reputation.

In this commemorative issue, we showcase a number of historical articles, one of which is from the front page of the

March/April 1979 issue. The then Editor was Prof Charles Ng, one of our pre-eminent senior obstetrician-gynaecologists, and that issue's front-page headline was a proposal for more structured newsletter contents moving forward, including a column for exchange and a mart to buy and sell goods, as well as a guest column that invited non-medical opinion makers to discuss topics like banking, taxes, stocks and shares and

the property market. Also proposed were a ladies' column for issues dedicated to women doctors, a literary column for doctor-writers and poets – Anton Chekhov, John Keats, Arthur Conan Doyle, Somerset Maugham, Lu Xun, Han Suyin and Khaled Hosseini were all medical doctors – a humour section containing even cartoons, and the eponymous travelogue. Today in the era of the Internet, social media, online shopping and artificial intelligence, that 1979 issue now appears quaint and archaic but certainly not irrelevant.

As *SMA News* Editor from 2004 to 2014, I saw how the power of the written word became a voice for the medical profession, embodying our slogan "For Doctors, For Patients". *SMA News* charted the odyssey of Singapore medicine, which has grown and transformed over the years and is highly regarded today for its world-class healthcare standards and delivery. Through the tumultuous years of pandemics like cholera and tuberculosis, from the corporatisation of public healthcare and restructuring of Government hospitals, to the battle cries and battle stations against the two modern pandemics of SARS and COVID-19, the heated debate on Guidelines on Fees and the initially hesitant introduction of residency training, *SMA News* grew into a sounding board, a soapbox for discourse and an invaluable document.

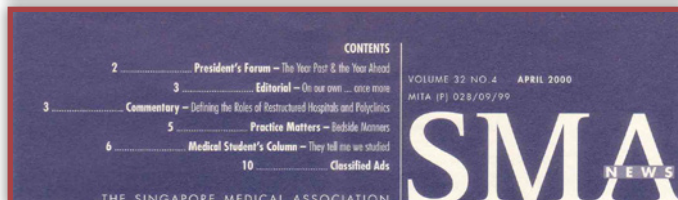
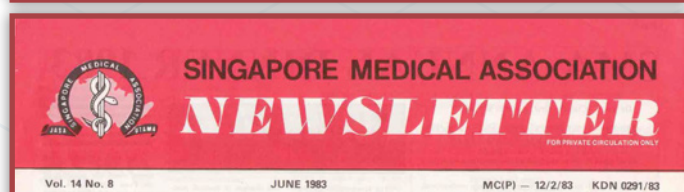
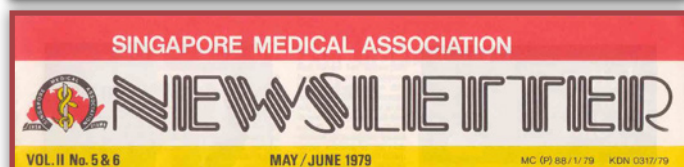
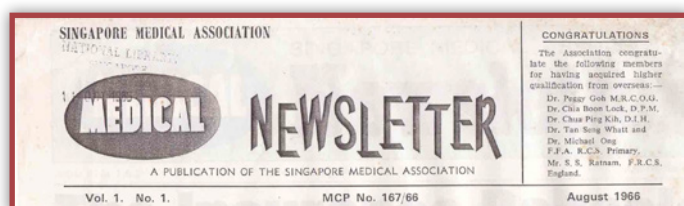
Another article we revisit in this issue is by regular *SMA News* columnist Garfield, the pseudonym of a gentle, beloved family physician who, alas, passed away too young from cancer. Garfield lamented the slow creep of defensive medicine, alluding to the erosion of beneficence, the

physician's intuition and personal touch, clinical acumen and the sacred doctor-patient relationship, and warned of the slippery slope towards rising healthcare costs – all of which could do the patient more harm than good.

Also in this issue is a classic article by the Hobbit. It was published during my time as Editor in 2006, so I know this satirical piece well. Many a time, I have had to carefully read and reread the often hot potato, hard truth and sometimes irreverent submissions from the Hobbit. I have often found myself verbally mud-wrestling with the Hobbit's passionate words, which admittedly come from a place of speaking up on behalf of the Singapore medical profession when he/she/it/they felt it was under siege. For sure, the Hobbit pens in a wry, witty erudite style peppered with unique humour, commonly spiced up with saucy sarcasm. For example, in "The Hobbit Meets Darth Vader", the Hobbit howls at the many struggles faced by GPs and how aesthetic medicine had become an alluring, addictive alternative avenue. This was 25 years ago.

I reminded the Hobbit that while anonymity affords a braver, bolder voice, the Editor would ultimately bear the consequences of any backlash. Anonymity in media is not new. I am a big fan of *The Economist*, where no article has a writer byline. Instead, it has anonymous writers such as Ashoka, Bagehot, Chaguan, Banyan Tree, Lexington and Schumpeter.

The next 60 years of medicine are hard to predict but will surely be beyond exciting. It will be a brave, new and hopefully better world for healthcare, the medical profession and mankind. ♦



Evolution of our newsletter's masthead over the years