



21st MASEAN Conference

Text by Denise Tan, Deputy Manager, International Relations and Dr Maxz Ho

The 21st Medical Association of Southeast Asian Nations (MASEAN) Conference, graciously hosted by the Philippine Medical Association (PMA), was held from 3 to 6 May 2026 at the Modala Beach Resort on Panglao Island, the Philippines. This year's theme is "A Regional Commitment to Physician Well-Being and Climate-Conscious Health Systems in Southeast Asia".

The event was held in conjunction with the International Seminar for Authors of Medical Journals from MASEAN Countries, organised by PMA and the MASEAN Group of Journals (GOJ).

The SMA delegation comprised:

- Adj A/Prof Ng Chew Lip, SMA Honorary Secretary; Secretary General of MASEAN;
- Dr Tammy Chan Teng Mui, SMA Council member; MASEAN treasurer;
- Prof Mahesh Choolani, Advisory Panel of Past Chairpersons, MASEAN GOJ;
- Dr Michael Lim Khong Jin, SMA Council member;
- Dr Maxz Ho, Secretary, MASEAN Junior Doctors Network (JDN);

- Dr Christina Png, MASEAN JDN member; and
- Ms Krysan Tan, Ms Denise Tan and Mr Spencer Soh, SMA Secretariat.

MASEAN GOJ

The MASEAN GOJ convened its annual Seminar for Authors, Editors and Reviewers of Medical Journals from MASEAN Countries on 3 May under the theme "Climate Science and Research Literacy". Chaired by A/Prof Maria Christina H Ventura, the seminar brought together medical editors, researchers and healthcare professionals to explore the critical intersection between climate change and health. The programme featured four sessions covering climate science for medical professionals, the health impacts of climate change, pathways to net-zero carbon and medical advocacy as well as research and publication practices in climate-related health topics.

This hybrid seminar highlighted the growing responsibility of the medical and scientific community in addressing climate change through evidence-based research, advocacy and scholarly communication. Participants gained valuable insights

into the latest climate science, emerging health challenges and the important role that medical journals play in advancing research literacy and disseminating knowledge to support informed policy and healthcare practice across the region.

As part of its advocacy efforts, a research forum was held on 4 May at Governor Celestino Gallares Memorial Medical Center to support researchers in their publication journey. Prof Maria Minerva P Calimag and Prof Jose Florencio Lapena Jr delivered lectures on research publication, followed by afternoon workshops led by MASEAN GOJ members in their respective fields of expertise. This initiative also helped offset the carbon footprint associated with holding the MASEAN meeting in Bohol this year.

MASEAN JDN

On 4 May, the MASEAN JDN convened for its third in-person meeting since its inauguration in 2024, chaired by Dr Marla Mae Callariga (incoming MASEAN chairperson) and Dr Maxz Ho (Secretary, MASEAN). This year's meeting marked a significant milestone with several key highlights.

First, the participation of junior doctors from the Philippines, Myanmar and Timor-Leste brought the total representation to eight JDNs across the ASEAN region. The expanded participation reflects MASEAN JDN's efforts to strengthen regional collaboration and advocacy for junior doctors within ASEAN. Second, MASEAN JDN invited the World Medical Association (WMA) JDN to the business meeting. WMA JDN's participation facilitated cross-learning and meaningful exchange of perspectives between junior doctors in ASEAN and the wider international medical community. Third, the Indonesian Medical Association and Medical Association of Thailand (MAT) presented scientific posters examining the prevalence and contributory factors of mental health concerns. These discussions prompted broader exchanges on workplace culture, psychological safety and mental well-being across junior doctors in ASEAN. Collectively, the meeting reaffirmed MASEAN JDN's shared commitment to fostering a safe and conducive training environment for junior doctors.

Installation of the new MASEAN Chairperson

The meeting opened with remarks by Dr Azizan Binti Abdul Aziz of the Malaysian Medical Association, who welcomed delegates, thanked the PMA

for hosting the conference and expressed appreciation to MASEAN member associations for their support during her two-year tenure as Chairperson. She then formally handed over the chairmanship to Dr Hector M Santos Jr of the PMA.

Following the ceremonial presentation of the MASEAN gold medallion, Dr Hector M Santos Jr officially assumed the role of Chairperson. The opening ceremony also included the Dr MK Rajakumar Memorial Oration, delivered by Dr Maria Minerva P Calimag. The oration honoured the legacy of Dr MK Rajakumar and recognised his significant contributions to the medical profession and the advancement of regional collaboration within MASEAN.

Induction of new MASEAN member

A significant milestone of the conference was the induction of the Association of Medical Doctors of Timor-Leste (AMTL) as a new member of MASEAN. The incoming Chairperson, outgoing Chairperson and Secretary General of MASEAN formally welcomed the AMTL delegation and officiated the induction ceremony. As a symbolic gesture marking Timor-Leste's entry into the MASEAN family, the AMTL delegates raised the national flag of Timor-Leste alongside those of the existing MASEAN member associations.

Scientific Symposium

The Scientific Symposium addressed contemporary challenges affecting physician wellbeing and professional resilience. Dr Robert D Buenaventura of the PMA opened the session with a presentation on the early detection of suicidal risk among health professionals, highlighting the importance of recognising subtle warning signs and fostering supportive workplace environments.

Dr Michael Lim Khong Jin subsequently discussed strategies for maintaining mental health when facing professional complaints, offering practical perspectives on coping with stress and preserving professional confidence. The symposium concluded with a presentation by A/Prof Rattapon Thuangtong of the MAT, who shared insights on physician well-being and the development of climate-conscious health systems in Thailand, underscoring the interconnectedness of healthcare sustainability, environmental responsibility and healthcare worker welfare.

Next MASEAN meeting

We extend our deepest appreciation to PMA for their warm hospitality and we look forward to the 22nd MASEAN Mid-Term meeting, which will be hosted by the Vietnam Medical Association in Da Nang, Vietnam in May 2027. ♦



Dr Ho is an Air Force medical officer and will commence his A&E residency training in 2027. He is currently vice chairperson of the SMA Doctors-in-Training Committee and serves as the secretary for the Medical Association of South East Asian Nations Junior Doctors Network. He believes that every junior doctor we invest in today becomes the mentor someone else needs tomorrow.



Legend

1. Induction of new MASEAN member, the Association of Medical Doctors of Timor-Leste
2. Members of MASEAN Junior Doctors Network