

Improving Communication Skills

SMA-MPS Workshop: Mastering Shared Decision Making

By Denise Yuen

In recent years, patients who are dissatisfied with clinical decision making are increasingly opting for litigation. To alleviate this situation, doctors need to possess communication skills to help them reduce their risk of patients' complaints and claims arising from clinical decision making consultations.

As such, Medical Protection Society (MPS), in conjunction with SMA, officially launched a new workshop, Mastering Shared Decision Making, at Sheraton Towers Singapore on 18 July 2012. About 20 people, comprising of doctors and lawyers, attended the launch event, which was a condensed version of the actual workshop.

The speaker, Dr Mark O'Brien, International Medical Education Consultant, MPS Education Services, noted that in clinical decision making, elements of risk arise from patient, clinician, disease and system factors. Examples of these factors include unrealistic expectations (a patient factor), a lack of training (a clinician factor), medical complications (a disease factor) and time pressures (a system factor).

He noted that the most frequent source of patient dissatisfaction is doctors' failure to communicate information, and that patient dissatisfaction is related to the quality and quantity of information received as well as the decision making process.

With regard to patient dissatisfaction related to information received, studies showed that up to 95% of patients want more information, and many patients desired more information than they received. Meanwhile, with regard to patient dissatisfaction related to the clinical decision making process, separate studies showed up to 58% of patients preferred a greater level of involvement than they experienced, and 96% wanted to be offered choices and be asked for their opinions. However, patients and doctors have their own preferences regarding the amount of information and the decision making process, and matching preferences alone does not reduce the risk of patients' complaints. Therefore, the best way forward for doctors is to ask and assess their patients.

Dr O'Brien went on to explain how to use a shared decision making process to reduce clinical decision making risks. This process included important aspects like eliciting patient knowledge, explaining clinical information, assessing patient expectations, addressing patient concerns, listing options, forecasting benefits and so on. Participants then watched a video in which a doctor had a short consultation with her patient, and were asked to note down what



Dr Mark O'Brien warming the audience up by getting them to introduce themselves

they would have done differently. This was followed by a discussion, and the doctors were especially forthcoming with their suggestions for improvement.

Participants who attend the actual workshop, targeted at both GPs and specialists, can expect a highly interactive experience, with short didactic presentations, reflective exercises, small group facilitated discussions, group activities and role plays. Its format has been specially designed to allow for a mix of lectures, discussion, critical reflections and evaluations to enhance participants' learning.

The Mastering Shared Decision Making workshops have begun their run. If you are interested in attending, please email Margaret Chan at margaret@sma.org.sg. **SMA**



Dr Teoh Ming Keng, Head of Medical Services (Asia), MPS (right) and Dr Mark O'Brien answering questions from the audience