

# SMA NEWS



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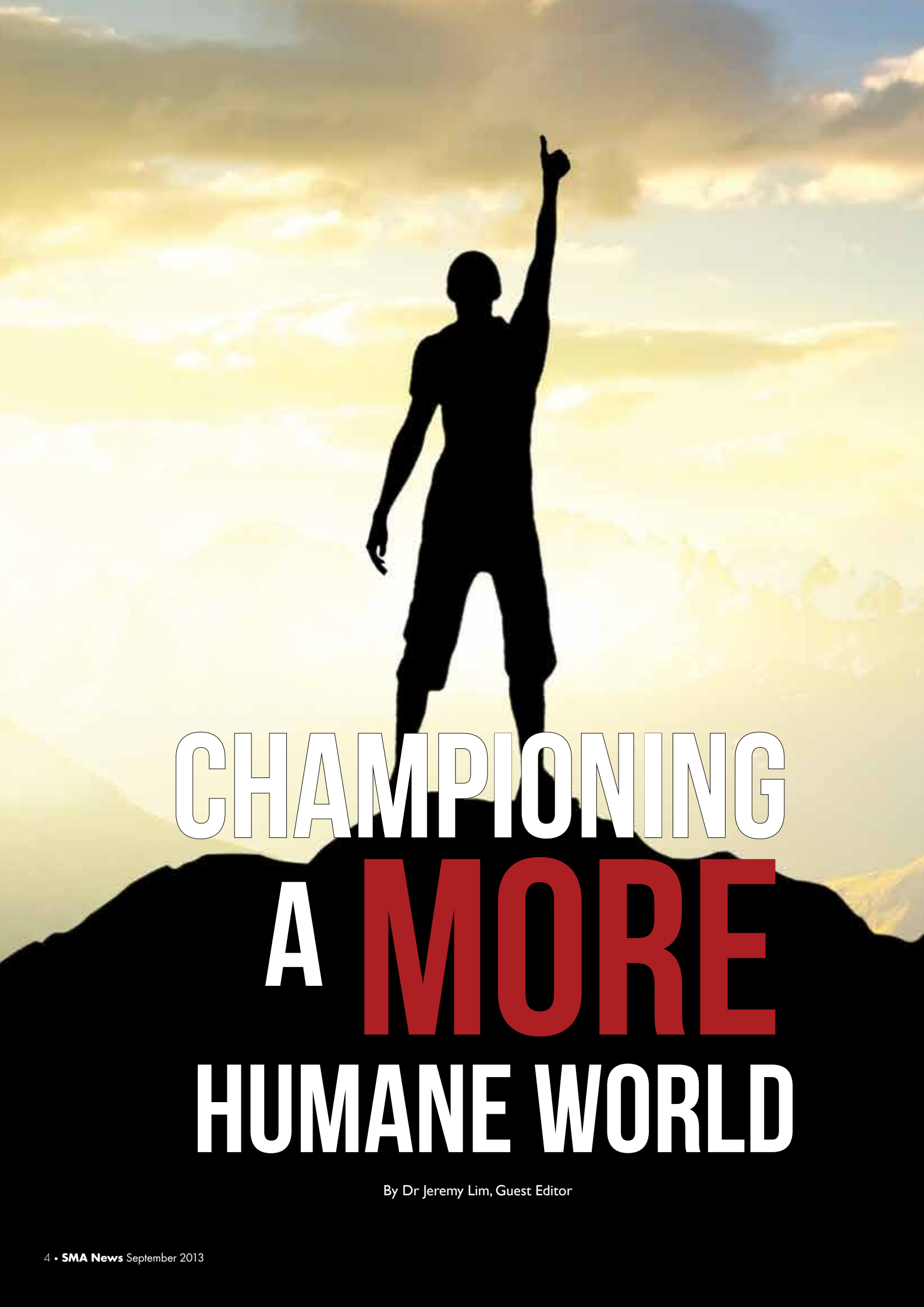


**Mr Ngiam Tong Dow**

On developing Singapore  
into an international  
medical centre

# BALANCING

**Policies, Politics & Profits**



# CHAMPIONING A **MORE** HUMANE WORLD

By Dr Jeremy Lim, Guest Editor

Doctors criticising government policies? Or going to Harvard to learn about public policy and government? How about advocating for migrant workers? What is the world coming to?

This month's issue of *SMA News* focuses on the balancing of health policies, politics, and profits, with contributions that restore the medical profession to what it has always intended to be: a voice for our patients, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Not surprisingly, the World Medical Association regards advocating for patients, both as a group (such as advocating on public health issues) and as individuals, as both an ethical duty and a professional responsibility.

This themed issue brings together an eclectic mix of contributors commenting about a wide range of topics. We have respected retired civil servant, Mr Ngiam Tong Dow candidly sharing his thoughts on Singapore Medicine and the folly of supplier-induced demand. In his own distinctively incisive brand of comment, Mr Ngiam also muses about the state of the public service and bemoans the consequences of high salaries, saying, "When the salary is so high, which minister dares to leave..."

Drs Chan Lai Gwen and Tan Chi Chiu offer perspectives on migrant workers and the aftermath of the "Susan Lim" judgement respectively. Additionally, Dr Christopher Lien offers a very personal glimpse into why he spent a year at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government to obtain a master's degree in Public Administration. As Dr Lien is currently spending some of his time in the Ministry of Health, we can expect the experience and expertise gained from his studies at Harvard to be put to good use on a national platform. Meanwhile, some of us have elected to offer alternative visions for the local healthcare system. Prof Paul Ananth Tambyah and Dr Tan Lip Hong, who worked on the Singapore Democratic Party's "National Healthcare Plan: Caring for All Singaporeans", emphatically declare in their

joint commentary on the World Health Organization's "World Health Report 2013: Research for Universal Health Coverage" that "Singaporeans deserve true comprehensive universal health coverage. We can make it happen."

Space disallows me from highlighting the other thought-provoking articles that can be found in this issue, but suffice to say, you will not regret taking the time to go through each and every article. September is special to me as well, as my book *Myth or Magic: The Singapore Healthcare System* was released earlier this month. (For more information about its official launch, please see page 42.) It describes how the Singapore healthcare system has evolved, what underlying political philosophies drive its financing and delivery designs, and what the future may hold in these turbulent times. As a Singaporean, I hope that my book will inform and offer a deeper understanding of the Singapore healthcare model, to encourage those who want to advocate, whether for reform or for status quo.

Finally, as guest editor of this issue, my hope is that both *SMA News* and *SMA* in general will not only be a "voice of the profession", but also enable a "voice by the profession". Doctors have traditionally played leading roles in civil society, championing a better and more humane world – not just by deed but also through thought, speech and the written word. The last few decades may have seen a relative muting of these efforts but the Singapore of today is different. *Let our voices be heard.* **SMA**



*Dr Lim is Principal Consultant, Insights Health Associates, and author of Myth or Magic: The Singapore Healthcare System.*